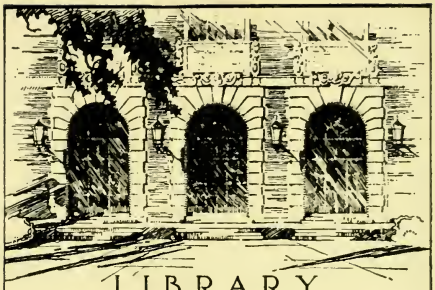

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THE

WORLD'S FURNITURE.

A NOVEL.

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart;
'Tis woman's whole existence....."
BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE

WORLD'S FURNITURE.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Graham was a distant conection of Sir William Fordyce. He was a Scotch laird, and had a very pretty place in the Highlands, Forestfern, where Sir William went generally every autumn for the grouse shooting. He married the youngest daughter of a Major Dunstan, who happened to be quartered for a short time at Edinburgh, and David Graham, then about three or four-and-twenty, was staying there a few weeks, met

her at a ball, fell in love with her and married her. He had no one to consult, his father and mother were dead, and he was the eldest son; he therefore had ample means, and found little difficulty in obtaining Major Dunstan's consent. They had several children, but all died but one son. In him they centered every hope. He was brought up unfortunately to think he was always to think more of himself than any one else. He consequently became thoroughly selfish. There had never been anything spared from his birth till now, to give him every possible advantage.

Mr. and Mrs. Graham lived but for him, and he thought they were amply repaid by the mere fact that he was their son. He felt as much affection for them as it was in his nature to feel for anyone. But they were contented, they made excuses to each other for him. It was a sad sight to see this fond father and mother bestowing all the depth

of their love on a selfish, cold-hearted, ungrateful child. One felt so sorry for them, and yet they did not see it themselves; they sometimes fancied David was a little irritable, but then, of course, poor boy! he had had something to annoy him.

Debts he could not well entail, for on that point his father had watched him carefully, and had so instilled into him the sorrow and disgrace that followed, that he had never had opportunity for the ill weed to grow, even if the root was there; but it is doubtful whether, had he been left entirely to himself, he would ever have shown any inclination towards it, for he was by nature mean and avaricious. He never would spend his money as a boy, he always returned home from school with the greater part of his money untouched. It is true, his every wish was gratified, he had but to ask and have.

Mr. and Mrs. Graham were very anxious for David to marry, he was now six-and-

twenty, and as yet had not shown the slightest inclination towards it. He was too fond of self and his own mode of life to like the idea of changing.

"But you need not change it, David," his mother once said to him, "whoever is fortunate enough to be your wife will be contented enough to do what you wish."

"I don't know that," said David, "it would be too late to find out after I was married that my wife disliked smoking in the drawing-room, or disliked my dogs coming in and out of the house; no, I can do as I like now, and don't care to make any trials."

And so it had gone on till now, and without any very great urging from his father or mother on the point, for they had conceived a little dream of their own. They already had a wife for David, they already had determined when the right time came that Hilda Chichester would be exactly the right person

to make their beloved son happy. They had quite sense enough not to let David have an idea of their project. They had never seen Hilda since she was thirteen years old, the last time she had been to Scotland with her uncle and aunt during their annual visit. But David had been very fond of her, and delighted at seeing her go wild about the heather. She was always with them in their daily shooting excursions, and David had once made her fire his gun off, though she did not do great damage with it.

But now Hilda was no longer a child, she was the right age for David, and though she had no fortune, he had enough; and perhaps her uncle might give her something, he had no children of his own, so there was every reason to think she had a good chance; but they did not care about that, they wanted a wife for David, one young enough for him to find willing to fall into

all his ways, and so Mr. and Mrs. Graham agreed there was no one so well suited to him as Hilda. They knew that in the following autumn she would be with Sir William and Lady Fordyce when they came, but in the interim, she was to have the run of the London season. They heard how pretty she had grown, and how much she was admired, so if they left matters to stand over till then, their whole plan might be frustrated, it had been such a happy idea to them that they could not give it up, so they determined to make themselves dreadfully uncomfortable by also going to London, but when it was for David they made any sacrifice, it was scarcely felt, it became a pleasure. There was still something to do, moreover, when that was arrranged, to get David to go with them. Fifty ways were discussed and relinquished as being too shallow for David not to guess at some part of the truth. But at last a bright

thought came to Mrs. Graham, she would require London advice; a London physician is always a good excuse for going to London, and she was not very strong, so that she had no difficulty in making David believe it really was necessary, and when once there, she knew any doctor would willingly assert it was necessary for her to remain.

David, after some demur, consented to go with them, but he would not remain, he had no intention of being broiled in London all the spring. The weather was cold now, so it might be bearable, but he would not stay a moment after the sun had once succeeded in showing itself in London. Mrs. Graham had no sooner proceeded so far in her plan, than she wrote off to Lady Fordyce, telling her that they were coming to London for some months, for her to be under the care of Dr. Barkley, and that she hoped they therefore should meet very soon. Lady Fordyce lost no time in writing and begging

of them to go first to Burwood and see them, and then go on to London.

This was what Mrs. Graham wished and expected, and the success of her project so far, had elated her so much, that, certainly, if a month ago she was in need of advice, she could not well make that excuse now, for she was looking better than she had done for years—it is astonishing how happiness improves health, and looks, and temper. For Mrs. Graham felt quite happy, she thought half the battle won, and that the rest was plain sailing. David was rather pleased than otherwise at the projected visit to Burwood, it was a short reprieve to him, it would delay the London visit a little longer, and so it was that they left Forest-fern in time to arrive at Burwood on the Saturday.

The Fordyces and Grahams were much attached, from old friendship and from a similarity in tastes and pursuits, so it was

with real pleasure they were welcomed at Burwood. Sir William stayed at home that he might see his old friend Graham as soon as he arrived, a distinction he had never made to any other visitor; and Hilda, too, felt very happy to see Mrs. Graham again, she had always been so kind to her, and David was never tired of helping her over the rough roads, and teaching her how to hold her rod when they were out fishing. But he had not improved since she had seen him; he was then between one or two and twenty, and had a mixture of boyishness in all he did, and many of his unamiable qualities were looked upon with excuse then, that now were too glaring to be passed over or misunderstood.

Mrs. Graham had never met the Phillips', but as they were crossing the hall to go up to their rooms, Matilda passed by rather hurriedly, too hurriedly for Lady Fordyce

to introduce them; so that whilst Mrs. Phillips joined her husband in the breakfast-room, where he was sitting, and remarked, "Those people have arrived, Tom, the Grahams, some more of that stupid Sir William's relations—I think he might do better than always be entertaining some of his family!" Mrs. Graham said to Hilda who had gone with her into her room, "Tell me, Hilda, who is that plain-looking woman we passed in the hall."

"You mean Matilda, my aunt's daughter, I forgot you had never seen her; she is ugly is she not, and, as you will find out soon, equally as agreeable."

"Well, Hilda, you can make up for her defects, how improved you are. Has David seen you?"

"We just shook hands, I am not quite sure he knew me, though."

"Well, go and look for him, and introduce yourself, though I suppose there is

not much time to do anything but dress before dinner."

"No, indeed there is no time for me to go and hunt for David, but there is time for me to order you a cup of tea, which by your looks I know you are dying for," said Hilda smiling.

"Do, dear, I should like it of all things," and Hilda went off on her errand. David had not recognised Hilda; some young lady shook hands with him, but he did not for a moment think it was her, till his father said to him,

"How coldly you spoke to your little friend, Hilda."

"Hilda! where was she? I did not see her."

"Why, you shook hands with her."

"Did I? why, was that rather tall, slight, pretty girl her, that was standing at the door as we came in?"

"Yes, to be sure, she is pretty, very

pretty—what eyes she has to be sure, enough to turn any man's head," and old Mr. Graham walked off with his hands under his coat, leaving his son to ruminate over the discovery of Hilda's beauty.

As Hilda came into the room dressed for dinner, she looked round to see who was there; she saw David standing by the table looking at a book, with only the fire-light to help him see its contents. She went up to him in a frank, easy manner, and said,

"Own the truth, David, you don't know me."

He turned round and looked at her.

"I do now though, by Jove you have grown so pretty how should I know you?" and he looked at her, and put his head so close to hers, that she drew shrinkingly back, and felt an uncomfortable sensation come over her she could not account for, but she laughed it off, and said,

"No compliments, David, you know I am

no longer a child, so I cannot believe nonsense."

She did not know that Mr. Graham was sitting at the further end of the blue drawing-room, and that not a word had been lost to him, and in the confusion of the others coming into the room, she did not know but what he came in with them. Mr. Graham told his wife that night what he had heard, and trifling as the words were, they knew their son well enough to feel sure that if David did take a fancy to her, he would soon set aside all his ideas of his ways being interfered with to gratify himself, for he never denied himself anything; as to the thought of Hilda making any opposition, the idea was too absurd to be entertained for a moment. A girl, without a penny, and a dependent, to refuse a man with a good fortune in possession, and a very large one in prospect was quite impossible. Mrs. Graham forgot at the mo-

ment that had Mr. Graham been penniless, and a man of fortune had proposed to her, she would have refused him without hesitation.

They wondered whether it would be good policy to leave things as they were for a day or two, or whether it would be best to speak to the Fordyces or David, or both; after talking, till they nearly talked themselves to sleep, they determined to rest upon their oars for a day or two. Hilda's pursuits were all calculated to attract and please David, riding, driving, hunting, and he seemed quite ready to fall into the trap his father and mother had set up for him.

"I have had a letter this morning from Wentworth," said Sir William, one morning at breakfast. "He can't come, I don't much care for myself, I like a man who does not mind getting his boots a little muddy sometimes, and he always looks to me as if he would faint, were he to see a spot on him."

"When did you ask him, uncle?" said Hilda looking up rather anxiously.

"I wrote the other day to see if he would come for the Chadwick ball, as I suppose they will expect us to take a few young men; and he struck me as being just fit for ball-room work and nothing else."

"Really, Hilda, I am sure Mr. Wentworth would feel very flattered were he to see your glum look," said Mrs. Phillips, "on hearing of his refusal; at all events he cannot have such pleasing reminiscences of Burwood, as it appears to have of him, or he would not have let the opportunity slip."

"Perhaps not," answered Hilda, rather put out by this piece of spite, "but I am far from being disappointed—it is quite a matter of indifference to me."

"I think, Hilda," said Lady Fordyce anxious to stop any further discussion on the subject, "you ought to walk over to the

Fentons this morning, you have not been since you lunched there."

"And take David with you," said Mrs. Graham.

"And mind and lock up your heart before you go," said Captain Phillips, "for I think Miss Fenton very likely to run away with it else."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Graham, rather alarmed, "I always understood Miss Fenton was not pretty."

"She certainly is not," said Lady Fordyce, "but she is very gentle and pleasing in her manner."

"Which is always a far more dangerous weapon to hold than beauty," said Matilda, glad to say something if she could at Hilda.

"Well, David, do you feel inclined to walk over with me and risk your heart," said Hilda perfectly herself again.

"Oh, certainly; are we to ride, drive or walk?"

"Walk, of course, it is not a mile from here."

"Very well, I am ready when you are."

They were soon gone, for Hilda was never very long in dressing for anything. But as soon as Mrs. Graham saw them fairly off, she started in pursuit of her husband, who had disappeared immediately after breakfast with Sir William. She wanted to consult him as to the propriety of at once speaking to Lady Fordyce about David. It would no longer do to let things be at a stand still, if there was the remotest chance of any one else coming in between them. Why, of course, he was quite certain to fall in love with this Mary Fenton, merely because they had set their hearts on his marrying Hilda.

Mrs. Graham met her husband in the long beech walk, a favourite place of Sir William's, because he generally was free from gardeners there, and they always seemed very busy in every other part of the

grounds. Mr. Graham was quite certain to think as his wife did, he always had, and he was quite certain that when David was the subject in question, she would never risk doing anything she was not perfectly certain would be for the best. Sir William who had stood a little way from them, as he saw they were discussing some private matter, called out, "I will go round to the other side of the beech walk, Graham, and you will find me by the pond."

"Suppose we speak to him at once, after all he is my relation, and you can go and talk to Lady Fordyce afterwards," said Mr. Graham.

"Very well, my dear, just as you think best."

"Here, Fordyce, don't go, step here a moment; we want to consult you on a subject of deep interest to us, and I fancy will be so to you too."

"What is it?" said Sir William, "you

may be sure I should be interested in anything that concerns you and yours."

"Well, Sir William, it is this," said Mrs. Graham, for she thought she had better be the spokeswoman. "You know how anxious we have been for David to marry young, for many reasons; he is rather inclined to give way to indolent and bad habits, I mean nothing actually wrong, but such as smoking too much, and dislike to mix in any society, and those sort of things that are apt to make the world think him a little selfish; but you know dear David well enough to feel sure he really is anything but that; however, we both think he would be much better and happier if he were married. Now the only person I have ever seen him show the slightest liking for, is Hilda, and Mr. Graham and myself have at length decided on asking you and Lady Fordyce, what you think of it, before we mention it to David, whether you would consent to Hilda becoming his wife."

"My dear Mrs. Graham, it is whether Hilda would consent; it really seems to me a good prospect for her, and as far as I am concerned, you know, though I see David's faults, I think him a capital fellow, and anything to unite us more closely, would give me pleasure."

"Well, so far so good," said Mr. Graham, "so you trot off, my dear, and see Lady Fordyce, and tell her all you think about the matter."

The two gentlemen continued their walk, without again alluding to the subject. Sir William, on the whole, did not feel quite comfortable about it, and he thought he would say nothing more till he had spoken to his wife.

Mrs. Graham was so delighted at the easy manner she seemed to be accomplishing her first attempt at match making, that it was with a very bright face she solicited a five minute's private talk from Lady Fordyce.

"You will wonder what in the world I can have to say to you, in so mysterious a manner," said Mrs. Graham, as soon as they were comfortably seated by a large blazing fire in Lady Fordyce's dressing room, "but it is really an important matter, and one I am sure you will feel equally interested in with myself. Mr. Graham and I have set our hearts on David marrying as soon as possible, and some short time since, the thought of Hilda suddenly occurred to us; David always liked her as a child, and as he never has shown the slightest symptom of caring for any one he has ever met, we thought if we could bring them together while she was still heart whole, it might turn out a happy marriage to both; and it was for that reason only I made the excuse of coming to London for my health, as I knew without some such reason, I should never succeed in getting David away from Forestfern.

"I wrote to you the moment that that

much was settled, and you know then you invited us here first, which so suited our prospects, that besides the pleasure of seeing you again, it gratified us very much. We discussed the matter on first arriving, whether we should speak to you at once, or whether we should speak to David; but it seemed more politic to leave the young people quite unsuspecting for the present. But this morning, when Mrs. Phillips mentioned Miss Fenton as being so attractive, I thought it was not safe to our plans, to leave it any longer without speaking to you; so I went just now to look for my husband, and found him with Sir William, and as he was there, I just told him in a few words what we so wished for, and whether he would consent. He said it must depend upon Hilda's consent, but I have no fear of her; she has known David so long, and must be herself quite free from any other attachment, that there seems no reason why she should not be very happy

with David. Now what do you think, dear Lady Fordyce?"

Lady Fordyce had never contemplated Hilda's marrying; since she had grown up, it had never crossed her mind, but as an event in the far distant future that must necessarily take place; but as to looking the fact full in the face, and think of Hilda leaving her for good, she could not realize it.

"You have taken me so completely by surprise, that I scarcely can believe I can have heard rightly. I cannot fancy Hilda marrying for the next ten years to come—why she is scarcely more than a child."

"But Hilda is nearly seventeen, and looks much older. I purposely arranged to be in London her first season that David might be always near her, for it is not probable, but that if she is not engaged before she goes out, she will certainly be engaged after the season is over, for she is very, very pretty. You are not going to refuse your consent I hope, it

would be such a bitter disappointment to me if you did."

"But," said Lady Fordyce suddenly, "you are not sure David would like to marry her."

"I think there is no fear of him, but of course the moment you let me, I will speak to him."

Lady Fordyce hesitated, it seemed like forcing Hilda into marriage, before she had had any opportunity of judging of other men; besides, Lady Fordyce was so well aware of David's faults, his selfish disposition, his temper, which she knew was bad, the way he treated his father and mother, he could not have a good heart to do so; and with all these failings, what prospect had her darling Hilda of happiness; however, she determined Hilda should decide for herself. No doubt, in a worldly point of view, it was a very good marriage, far beyond what she had a right to expect, as she had no fortune herself; but then she had beauty enough to make up for any want.

"Don't you think she could be happy with him?" said Mrs. Graham, watching Lady Fordyce's countenance, which was anything but joyous looking.

"I don't say she could not be happy with him; but I think it would be unfair to Hilda to let her bind herself by any long agreement till she is older, or, at all events, till she has seen a little more of the world, and able to judge better whether she would be contented to become David's wife."

"But, dear Lady Fordyce, it is for the sole purpose of preventing her from judging at all about the matter, that I was so anxious to be in town when you first took her there; for if she goes into society as a *fiancée*, it is not probable that any man will think about her any more than if she were married."

"I don't know about that, I am sure," said Lady Fordyce, "but I will talk to Sir William, and hear what he says; but do not imagine that I should not be most delighted if

Hilda herself liked it, to see her well married, and, more especially, to David, for I know you are very fond of her, and I am certain you would do all you could to make them happy."

"Well, then, I may speak to David, at all events?"

"Yes, I can see no harm that could do."

So Mrs. Graham lost no time in looking for David; but he had not returned home yet, so she had time to tell her husband all that had passed between herself and Lady Fordyce.

Hilda came in presently alone. She sat down in a chair that was in the hall close to the billiard-table, and taking up the mace, began pushing the balls about. She looked tired and rather cross, evidently something had vexed her. After knocking about the balls in a very unsatisfactory manner, she jumped up suddenly and said, as John, the old butler, was crossing the hall,

"Is Sailor in, John, or has he gone out with the horses?"

"I think he is in the kennel, Miss, but I will go and see."

"No, never mind, I will go myself;" and off she went, to see if Sailor, who, as far as he could, had succeeded Don in her affections. Sailor was there, this was fortunate; for Hilda would have been doubly vexed if she had had no one to talk to just then.

"Come, old fellow, let us take a run. I am tired, but I think it will do me good."

Sailor bounded after her, and they were soon out of sight.

Hilda and David had walked over to Hawthorn Hill, and found all the Fentons at home. Mrs. Fenton always gave a warmer welcome to a man than to a woman; she was most anxious to get her daughter out of the way and married, and, therefore, any new man was made much of, till it was quite evi-

dent his intentions were not to remove Miss Mary Fenton from her paternal roof.

David was, therefore, most graciously received; besides, Mrs. Fenton had learnt that he was an only son, heir to a large property, and already in possession of a very good income.

"I hope you have come to stay luncheon, Hilda, and that your cousin will do so also. Mary is at home, and will be so glad to see you. Go and look for her, my dear."

"Thank you, Mrs. Fenton, I cannot stop, but we will rest a little while, and I will go and see if Mary is in the garden."

"You have never been in this part of the country before, have you, Mr. Graham?" said Mrs. Fenton, as soon as Hilda had left the room.

"No, never; I never leave Scotland if I can help it, but my mother's ill health brought us to England now."

"You are fond of country amusements

and sports, I am sure. My son has just bought a new horse for hunting, and he is now in the stables looking at it; perhaps, if you are a judge, you would like to see it."

"Very much," said David, who was glad of the prospect of doing anything rather than sit any longer talking to Mrs. Fenton.

Mrs. Fenton went out of the room to call her son herself, and tell him to try and get David amused with one thing or another till luncheon time. Mrs. Fenton thought if she did that, he would be obliged to remain, and if Hilda would not wait for him so much the better, Mary would have a better chance by herself. Besides, Hilda was no favourite with her, she thought her much too independant for a young lady.

David and Frederick Fenton were soon friends, and their tastes were very similar; they were neither of them very refined, and with their cigars, the time passed quickly enough, so that, by the time the horses,

dogs, and fishing apparatus had been well inspected, luncheon time had not only arrived, but passed, and when they went in, David found Hilda gone.

Hilda, in the meantime, had been talking to Mary in her own room, and when she came down to tell David they must go, he was not there; she waited and waited, but he did not come, so she at last went back by herself, thinking David very rude; and Mrs. Fenton did not improve it by saying that Hilda had no right to expect every one to be at her beck and call, people would think she was given to flirting if she always seemed so *exigeante*.

When Mrs. Fenton thought Hilda quite beyond recall, and that she was gone too far for her cousin to think it worth while to follow her, she sent Mary out to fetch him and her brother in. He was not pleased at Hilda going without him, he was so accustomed for other people to do

as he liked, that he did not understand it, when anybody acted a little after their own fancy. Mrs. Fenton took every care to make David think it was temper in Hilda, and said, "It is such a pity, Mr. Graham, that Lady Fordyce spoils Hilda as she does; she really brings her up to think everybody must be her slave, and it has become so confirmed in her that she expects every one to give way to her."

"She will find herself mistaken if she thinks I am going to give in to all her whims and fancies."

Mrs. Fenton succeeded in making David very angry with Hilda, and in keeping him not only to luncheon, but to dinner too, and she sent a message up to Burwood to tell them not to wait for him.

Mrs. Graham was very angry, and she went to Hilda's room to see if she was there, as she heard she had come in alone. Hilda had just returned from her last walk with

Sailor, and, herself again, she was sitting at her table writing a long letter to Frank.

"What have you done with David?" said Mrs. Graham, "where is he?"

"Indeed, I don't know, I think he was very rude," said Hilda smiling, "and I came in feeling angry with him, but I forgive him now, for I don't suppose it was his fault."

"Why, what has he done?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"Well, nothing after all very dreadful," said Hilda, "only he knew I declined staying luncheon at Hawthorn Hill, and yet he went out with Frederick Fenton, and had not returned when I left, though I waited as long as I possibly could. I never stay anywhere unless my aunt knows of it, and so I did not like doing so to-day."

"You were quite right, dear, David ought to have known better."

"Oh, I daresay he found plenty to amuse

him, and the time passed more quickly than he thought," said Hilda.

Mrs. Graham determined she would not go to bed that night till she had told David her hopes and wishes; she had no intention of letting him throw himself away, as she thought he would do on Mary Fenton. It was late when David came back, and they were all about to retire as he walked in.

"Well, David, I suppose you have enjoyed yourself, to judge from your dissipated hours?" said Sir William.

"How very thoughtless of you, my dear, to leave your cousin to come home alone," mildly remarked Mrs. Graham.

"What do you think of Mary?" asked Mrs. Phillips.

"Whenever you give me time to answer all of your questions I will do so," said David, "but, really, you quite confuse me all coming down upon me at once, in this manner."

"I will answer for you, David," said Hilda, "you look tired, and it will save you the trouble. In the first place, he did enjoy himself very much, Mrs. Fenton made herself irresistible as soon as I was gone, to say nothing of Mary," and here Hilda turned towards Mrs. Phillips, "who has carried David's heart by her yielding, gentle ways; and as to leaving me to take care of myself, why you know, Mrs. Graham, we are cousins."

"Really, Hilda," said David, "I do think you have answered just as well as I could myself, one would imagine you had the gift of clairvoyance, and had been watching me all day."

"Well, now we will all go to bed," said Lady Fordyce.

The ladies all left, but Mrs. Graham had told her husband to send David up to her immediately; he accordingly did so, and David, who was tired, and not in a humour to sit up talking to his mother, went in

saying, "What do you want mother, make haste, for I am sleepy, and want to go to bed."

"You must not hurry me, dear, because I want to speak to you seriously, very seriously, and I have a great deal to say."

"Then you really must wait till to-morrow, for I couldn't listen to-night."

"Yes, to-night, dear David, do not refuse me," and his mother laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked at him with her countenance so full of love, that he had not the heart to refuse her.

"Well, what is it—no bad news, nothing wrong about my father?" he asked rather anxiously, for he had never known his mother urge a request after his once refusing, and he thought there must be something of importance, indeed, for her to persist in making him remain and listen to her when he was tired and sleepy.

"No, my son, no bad news, and, thank

God; nothing wrong with your father; but it is about yourself, David, that I wish to speak to you, about your future. You know how devoted your father and I are to you, you know that to give you happiness we would sacrifice all our own wishes, and it is in the hopes of securing that happiness that I want to tell you of a dream that I have dwelt on for some time, and that it only remains for you to make it a reality. We have always wished you might marry young, but still, as you never seemed to feel the slightest inclination to do so, you know, we have never urged it. But now, I fancy I have noticed you are not quite indifferent to Hilda Chichester, and if so, you know not the joy it would give both your father and myself, were you to make her your wife.

"She is so young that you could mould her to all your own ways, and her disposition is so loving and affectionate, that I am quite certain she could not fail to make you happy."

Mrs. Graham paused and looked up to see if she could judge, by her son's countenance, what effect her words had on him. He made no reply for a minute or two, and she did not attempt to disturb his train of thought; he then said very slowly as if he were thinking between each word, "I never have once given marriage a thought. Why do you wish me to marry, and why do you think it would be better for me to marry Hilda than any one else. I certainly have never shown her any preference that I am aware of, beyond what one would naturally feel for a person one has known and seen constantly from childhood."

"I would wish you to marry, David, because your father and I are neither very young, in the course of nature we cannot look forward to be many years with you; and it would be such joy to me to be able to see you with a wife that would be your companion and comfort in sickness and

sorrow, or health and happiness. I think it would be better for you to marry Hilda than any one else that I know, for she is so peculiarly situated that you would marry her and her only, whereas with half the girls going, one might say you not only marry them, but their whole family, and that I know you would never like. You would not like the interference of the mother or sisters of your wife, and yet that is the usual result of marrying a woman who has relations. Hilda has relations, and near ones it is true, but she is so situated that none of them would ever be in your way."

"Well, what is it you want me to say? I don't dislike Hilda and I think her wonderfully pretty; but I could not stand her giving herself such airs as she did to-day. Why, because I was not in the moment she expected me, she bolts off to walk home by herself. I wish you had seen Mary Fenton,

she would be much more tractable than Hilda, and her mother has clearly brought her up to do other people's will and not her own, whereas Hilda is quite the reverse."

"I dare say I shall see Miss Fenton soon enough," said Mrs. Graham, "but from what I hear of her mother and brother, she would be anything but a good wife for you, your home would not be your own very long; but, however, we are talking nonsense and wasting time, for it would grieve me very much if I thought you would give a moment's consideration to such a foolish idea." Mrs. Graham paused, but as David made no reply, she said, "I do not ask you to marry Hilda at once, or even to consider yourself engaged to her till three or four months are over. Wait till she has been presented, and seen a little society; but I should like you to speak to her, and tell her of your hopes of her becoming your wife.

"Is Hilda willing to marry me?" asked David in the most unconcerned manner.

"Why not, David, she has never seen any one but yourself; she was fond of you when she was a child, and if the thing is put before her now, as a matter of course, she will never dream of offering any opposition; but if it is delayed, she will form new acquaintances now she is going into society, and then it might be too late."

"Well, mother," said David, getting up and stretching himself, and in the middle of a most uncomfortable yawn. "I will sleep over it, and tell you to-morrow. A man can't settle in a moment to marry."

"Do not, David, leave me in indecision, suspense is horrible; let it be a settled, yes or no. If you tell me, the idea is disagreeable to you in any way, or marriage at all, I will never speak on the subject again, and instead of going to town we will go straight back to Forestfern."

"What," said David, interrupting her, "would the prospect then of my never marrying have the happy effect of curing you of your ailments; I thought you were anxious for it, and yet you can't want to continue ill."

"No," said Mrs. Graham, smiling, "it would not cure me, but you may as well know, as I foolishly have said so much, that the only reason of our coming was in the hopes of your not totally disliking the plan of marrying Hilda, and therefore if you have such a decided objection to it, we need not add to our disappointment by victimizing ourselves with spending two or three months in London, when we could be in our own comfortable home."

"Well, but I don't now quite understand you," said David, "if we only came over to see Hilda, or to make me fall in love with her, what in any case would be the benefit of our being in town?"

"Why this," said Mrs. Graham, "that if you are always seen with her, and it is understood that though there is no binding engagement, that at the end of the season you are to marry her, you will find no one will come between you and her—whereas, so pretty a girl is sure to have loads of admirers, and it is not probable but what she would soon learn to prefer one to the others, and then all our hopes would be at an end."

"Do you wish me to say 'yes' to-night, and propose to her to-morrow?" said David again yawning.

"I do wish you to say, 'yes' to-night, answered his mother, "but as to proposing to-morrow, I think it would be better for her aunt to speak to her first."

"Very well, then, now I may go, I suppose," asked David.

"Yes, you may go now; may God bless you, my beloved son, and good night," and

his mother put her arms round him and kissed him. David went to bed, and dreamt that he was riding with Hilda Chichester on one side of him, and Mary Fenton on the other; that they rode and rode on over smooth turf, till suddenly their horses sunk into a deep piece of marsh ground, and he awoke in the midst of dragging out Mary Fenton; he had left Hilda in the middle of his dream and the mud.

CHAPTER II.

When once Lady Fordyce had been enabled to envisage the idea of Hilda's marrying, she thought it no bad prospect for her to become the wife of David Graham. But she still thought her too young as yet, and she did not quite think it just to entangle her in an engagement, till she had had some little opportunity of seeing the rest of mankind. Sir William was quite indifferent, provided there was to be no wedding at present; he cared little whether she was presented to the world as a *fiancée*, or whether she entered it heart and hand both free.

When Lady Fordyce first broached the subject with Hilda, she found it much more

difficult than she imagined; it looked so very much as if she were anxious to get rid of her as soon as possible, or as if she did not intend the first offer to slip through her fingers, especially as it was no such bad one after all.

Hilda was one of those genuine, true, unaffected girls, that she never for an instant doubted her aunt's intentions being otherwise than arising from the purest and sincerest affection; and so they were—she would have done nothing, consented to nothing, but what she considered would tend to Hilda's ultimate good. She knew David's bad qualities well enough, but she thought Hilda could make him what she liked; that if he loved Hilda, and from what Mrs. Graham had told her that morning, she imagined he did, there would be no difficulty on her side to mould him to her own fancy.

Hilda scarcely knew what to feel or say. She did not dislike David, she had known him from her earliest childhood, and he used

to be very kind and good natured to her, but she did not love him—far from it; when she went to her boudoir after her aunt telling her about it, to think quietly over this new future, she thought she should not like David always to live with her, he was too rough, and he was not refined enough, and he could do nothing but hunt, and shoot, and fish. It was true she liked those occupations too, but there were times when she thought she should like something more companionable.

David never could sit down and talk for half an hour if he tried; he found nothing to say, and always looked intensely bored. She was very fond of music, and he could not bear it; and then a thought passed her mind, and she wished he could sing, that he could sing like Walter Wentworth, and she thought she could like him better if he could sing even a little.

Hilda had never read works of fiction, she knew as yet nothing of the romance of life,

and therefore she did not know, or feel, that David's was a strange mode of making love; in fact, that part of the business had never been thought of. His father and mother said all they thought necessary to Sir William and Lady Fordyce, and anything more was considered unnecessary. Hilda had no wish for any change, she was so happy, and, without knowing why, this engagement, or whatever they chose to term it, made her feel less joyous. It did not absolutely weigh upon her, but she felt a something that was unpleasant, and that she longed to throw off.

She had been sitting on her sofa, with her elbow buried in the soft cushion, and had determined, as she had done in her childish days, and as she had continued to do ever since, to go and tell it all to Sailor, for Sailor now, was what Don had been, her companion and friend. She looked pale, and had pushed her hair rather off her fore-

head, but she looked, at that moment, very beautiful, for there was a shadow of sadness over her face that, perhaps, had never been seen before. A gentle knock made her start, for all was very quiet. She said, "come in," and David opened the door.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Yes, I was just going to take a walk, are you going out?" she answered, for she did not feel disposed to remain and talk; she thought he had, perhaps, come to speak about their marriage. He seemed suddenly changed when she looked at him; she no longer saw the David who had been her companion for so long, he looked like a stranger to her. She shuddered when she thought that really she was to be his, always to live with him—to leave her own dear happy home to go and live in his, and, before she could attain sufficient command over herself, she buried her face in the pillow she was resting on and burst into tears.

David was not by nature kind-hearted, he did not understand either the sensitiveness of a woman's heart; tears were, to him, things that belonged particularly to a child, and he thought that any one, not a child, who could give way to them must be a fool. It was therefore not in the most soothing voice that he said,

"If the sight of me makes you cry, I had better go again."

"No, David, it is not that, I am very silly I know, but I could not help it," she answered.

"Help what?" he asked, "have you hurt yourself?"

"No, I have not hurt myself; but we will not talk about it," said Hilda.

David sat down by the window, and taking up a piece of narrow blue ribbon and a pair of scissors he found by it, he began cutting it up in shreds. Hilda felt that David would never have come to her room, the

first time he had ever done so, unless he had come to speak about the position they held to each other, and she felt herself getting so nervous and uncomfortable that she could bear it no longer. She could not wait till he had quite finished destroying her ribbon, before he chose to begin the subject, so she said,

"I have just left my aunt, David, and she has been telling me of your wishes, together with your father's and mother's, with regard to myself."

"Oh, you have, have you—how do you like the idea? they all seem determined we are to marry each other." David was no longer the least shy; she had broken the ice, and so he cared no longer, it was only for the first moment he did not know what to say. He did not move though, or turn round till Hilda said,

"My aunt and your mother seem to think it will be for our happiness, and I suppose

you think so too, and I am quite willing to do what all wish."

"Well, I suppose we shall get on, you don't expect me to make love to you, or anything of that kind, and we are not to be married, you know, till the summer; for you are to have what they call your first season, and be presented, and all that sort of thing beforehand—great nonsense, I think."

"And we are not to be engaged either," said Hilda.

"Well, no," said David, "at least, nothing is to be said about it; but, I suppose, as we are to be married in the end, people will consider it as a matter of course that we must be engaged."

David felt annoyed, and yet he did not know why, that Hilda said they were not to be engaged; it looked as if she was not so anxious about it as he expected any woman would be, where he was con-

cerned. He did not care for Hilda, but his mother had talked him into thinking it would be a good thing, and he looked upon her as being so fortunate in getting him for a husband, that he thought she ought to appreciate her good fortune.

He got up and went and sat down by her side on the sofa, she shrunk a little closer to the pilow, not that there was any need of it, for David had told her truly, he could not make love to her, and had no intention; but she looked very pretty, and the very fact of her seeming indifference made him the more inclined to be exigeant. Had she appeared very elated, he would have left the room, quite careless of whether he ever saw her again or not; but now a sort of obstinate, stubborn desire was taking possession of him, to make her feel he was master of her, and her movements, and wishes. He disliked her for not showing any joy, but he determined

to marry her. They sat for some minutes in perfect silence, each busy with their thoughts.

It was a strange thing that fate should have intended these two to come together, for they were so unsuited to each other, they felt it; but neither thought of saying or doing anything that would prevent it. It never occurred to Hilda to tell her aunt she did not like David, and that the thought of marrying him was distasteful to her, she did not think of herself, or she must have done so; she only knew her aunt told her it would make her very happy to see her David's wife, and she could not say anything that would make her aunt unhappy—besides, what reason could she give for not consenting to the wishes of those so dear to her, she had no plausible one, or, at least, none that occurred to her; and so she gave what is generally considered as consent, and that was, silence.

"Will your mother be glad to hear of this, Hilda?" asked David.

"I suppose mamma, like every one else, will think it all right," said Hilda.

"But she will so seldom see you when you are married," said David, "for she cannot run backwards and forwards to the North of Scotland as she does to Burwood."

"Oh, I do not see a very great deal of her; she does not come much oftener than twice a year here, and that was generally during my holidays. She is not strong, and not able to undergo much exertion, but once started, I suppose she could come to Scotland as well as she could come here."

"I don't know," answered David, he was going to add, "I shall not choose her to come when she likes," but he stopped in time. It was well he did, for it is doubtful if Hilda would not have made some rejoinder it would have been difficult to have got over.

There was another knock at the door. It was fortunate these two were not to have their first interview as lovers prolonged, for it would not have tended to make them better disposed to one another. It was Matilda. She had always knocked since the battle she and Hilda had had on the subject more than a year ago. She came in.

"It is too bad to disturb you," she said, "but I could not resist coming to congratulate you. Mamma has just told me the news."

"So you think we are to be congratulated," said David, "I was not quite certain, myself, for Hilda looks as glum as if some misfortune had befallen her."

"Indeed, I think Hilda the most fortunate girl known, and she does not deserve her luck if she does not know how to appreciate it," answered Matilda.

"Really, I don't see anything so very wonderful," said Hilda, a little vexed. "I

never sought the honour of becoming David's wife."

Matilda made no answer to her, but turned to David, and said,

"I am going to drive to Hawthorn Hill; will you drive me over in the pony carriage?"

"Certainly," said David; "and I may flirt now to any extent with Miss Mary Fenton; as I am booked, I am safe."

"I will take care and tell them," said Matilda, "for fear of any consequences."

"Not on my account, pray," said Hilda, as they left the room together.

As she sat alone again, she wondered what it was made her feel so irritable; she could not understand her own feelings. She thought, however, it was useless to sit there all day doing nothing, so she took some paper, and wrote a long letter to her mother. She told her about her having consented to marry David Graham; she told her what

they were all doing, all they had done, and the probable arrangements for the future. They were soon to be in town, and would probably soon meet.

She then wrote another letter to her brother Frank, a longer one, and one that told a little more of her actual feelings. She was unconscious of the difference herself, but the fact of the one not reaching for many weeks, enabled her to write with a freedom she could not, when she knew what she was then writing would be read by her mother and brother next morning. After having sealed them, she took them down, and put them in the old oak letter box that stood in the hall at a side table.

She then went and enquired where her uncle was. They told her in his own room. So she went to him. She felt so much fonder of him, and every one, and everything that belonged to Burwood than she had ever done before.

"Will you ride this afternoon, uncle?" she said, as she went in.

"No; I am busy with my horrid magisterial duties," he answered, continuing his writing.

Hilda waited a moment, and then moved to go away. Her uncle looked up at her.

"Why, you look pale, child! What's the matter?" he said. "Come here, Hilda."

"Nothing, dear uncle," said Hilda, as she went and stood by him, "only I thought a canter on Spitfire with you would do me good. I feel so stupid to-day!"

"Go, dear, and order the horses, and get ready. I am glad I saw you, or I should not have had the treat myself," he said, smiling; "you know I am always glad of a plausible excuse to get rid of this dry work;" for he saw Hilda wavered a little.

So she went and ordered the horses round, and told Sailor as he was a good boy he should go, too; and she ran up to her room

to put on her habit. And in ten minutes, they were at a fast canter, going through the pretty road that led them out of the gate at the farthest part of the Park. And once on horseback, all Hilda's black clouds flew by, and nothing but a clear, bright prospect was before her. She was too young yet for anything to remain very heavily on her; besides, this was a weight she could not know or understand. It was well for her she did not, the knowledge and understanding too, would, doubtless, come in time.

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Graham succeeded so well in all her cherished hopes, that by the time they were to go up to town, it was arranged the Fordyces and Hilda should go also.

The Phillips's had left. They found it stupid. They expected a great deal of gaiety, and there was but the Chadwick ball, which all had gone to, and no one enjoyed, and one or two stiff, disagreeable dinners. They remained the three weeks, but would not stay longer.

Lady Fordyce had been unfortunate in all her invitations; every one seemed better engaged, for they could not come. Little, too,

as either Sir William or herself allowed themselves to feel Hilda's engagement, which was now looked on as an affair settled, as otherwise than a subject of great delight, they could no longer couple her name with theirs in all their plans.

Hilda had become more cheerful after the first few days, and as David did not interfere with her a bit more than before, she went on as usual, in all her accustomed ways. She never spoke on the subject to her aunt, and, indeed, avoided it with every one. She dwelt on it as little as possible when alone, but her mind had begun to be accustomed to the idea, and so it no longer preyed on her as it did at first.

Mrs. Phillips, as soon as she got to town, looked out for a house for her mother, and succeeded in getting her a very charming one in Park Lane, looking into the Apsley Gardens. The Grahams were to be in Grosvenor Place, so that they would not be far apart.

Arthur went down to Burwood a week before they all came up to town. His mother was better, and he wanted a little fresh air to brace him up for the long months he had before him in London. He was, of all the family, the most pleased with Hilda's prospects. He thought it of little consequence whether she liked it or not; it was a good thing for her, and that ought to be enough. David was a capital good fellow, honest and upright; and what more could a girl possibly wish for? It mattered little what his face or his manners were, if his principles were good; and as to his being selfish, women say all men are selfish, so, on that head, one is as good as another, and David's sterling qualities would outweigh any little defects that might be the result of having had too indulgent parents, consequent upon being an only child.

Arthur was almost daily at Hawthorn Hill. He liked Mary Fenton's quiet, unaffected ways, and she began to find out that Arthur

was wondrously handsome; but Mrs. Fenton had no idea of letting her silly Mary marry a man with nothing but a good-looking face for his fortune. She, however, let him come and go as he liked; it mattered little whether Mary lost her heart or not, she did not believe in such things—and if that happened, why she thought it must be as easy to find it again as it had been to lose it. It is very true Mrs. Fenton herself was perfectly innocent of ever having committed such an unmaidenly act as falling in love with any one, and she expected her daughter, on that point, to follow her example.

Be that as it may, it is very certain that the evening before all were to go up to town, Arthur and Hilda walked over together to take leave of the Fentons, and though it was still cold, and the evenings short, Arthur or Mary, or both between them, managed so that she and Frederick were to walk part of the way back to Burwood with them.

But Mary returned home with a heavier heart than when she started. She thought Arthur liked her, she knew she liked him, and yet he had wished her good-bye in a cold, formal manner, without any allusion, or expressing any hope that they might meet again. She did not hear Arthur say to Hilda, as they continued their way alone, "Perhaps you will be able to get my aunt to invite Miss Fenton to pay you a visit in town, for she must pass a miserable time with that mother of hers." If she had, she would have been perfectly contented, and lived happily for months on the hopes of such a proposition being carried out, without murmuring or impatience.

They had been in town a few weeks, and Hilda was beginning thoroughly to enjoy herself. She had not been out a great deal, for her aunt wished her to be presented first, but she had gone to one or two quiet little musical parties, and had dined out once or

twice at some of their intimate friends. It required, too, some time for Lady Fordyce to gather all her old acquaintances round her, for it was so many years since she had gone through a London season that she found many changes had taken place.

Hilda did not find the confinement of London half so much as she expected, for her uncle always made a point of riding with her from eight till ten, and then Lady Fordyce sent Hilda into the gardens to walk for an hour every morning after her ride. She did not intend her to look at the end of the season as most young ladies do, faded and worn. The afternoons were spent in driving, when much business was got through in the shape of shopping, leaving cards, and driving up and down by the Serpentine, when there was a spare half hour.

It was one of these slow marches that the carriages all came to a stand still for a

few minutes, and as Hilda was watching the pedestrians on the side by the water, whilst her aunt's head was turned looking on the other side at the people in the carriages, a gentleman bowed to her, she instantly recognized Mr. Wentworth.

Oh, aunt, there is Mr. Wentworth," she suddenly said, "he is coming up to speak, I think," and so no doubt he meant to do, but the carriages moved on, and she lost sight of him in the crowd.

Mr. Wentworth finding he could not get up to the Fordyce's carriage to speak to them, instantly turned back, walked out of the Park and went down to the Carlton to see if Sir William was in town, and to ascertain if he could find where they were. He would have gone to Mr. Bingham's, but he knew he was off again on one of his interminable journeys, no one scarcely knowing whither.

He was told Sir William was in town,

but they could not give him his address, because he had not left it; Walter would not leave his card, for it might not be returned, and then all must end there. He preferred waiting till he could find out where they were living, and call on the ladies when he thought it probable he should find them at home. He spent two days in vain researches, which only made him more anxious than before; at last it suddenly struck him, he would call and ask at Mrs. Phillips' though he was unaquainted with her, she of course would know her mother's address. He could not imagine how he had been so stupid as not to have done so sooner; however, he lost no time now, and having once obtained the direction, he went to Park Lane, and was fortunate enough to find Lady Fordyce at home. He told her of his endeavours to find them out.

"I should not have let you remain in ignorance of our being in town so long,"

said Lady Fordyce, "only that till my niece is presented, I go out very little, and I have not received any friends at home, but as the drawing-room will be next week, I shall hope to see you at a little dance, that I am thinking of giving a few days afterwards."

"I shall be most happy," said Mr. Wentworth, "I hope Miss Chichester is quite well?"

"Quite, thank you, she is walking in the garden there in front. I insist upon her doing so every day, for she has been so accustomed to out door amusements, that I am half afraid of the effect of a London life on her."

"You will find when once you are launched out, it will be difficult to draw in, so I think you are very wise to be fortifying her for the dissipation in prospect," said Walter. "Are you going to Lady Damer's concert on Thursday?"

"I scarcely think I shall, we have had an invitation, but I think it is likely to be very full, and so we had better not."

"I don't think you will meet a great many people, it is the first Lady Damer has given this season, and she told me she should only have a small party."

"In that case I don't mind taking Hilda if she wishes."

"Well then, I shall hope to meet you there," said Mr. Wentworth, as he rose to take leave.

When Walter got into the street, his first impulse was to walk round the gardens to see Hilda if possible; he was disappointed at not finding her at home, as he had an undefined sort of wish to see her face again, it had struck him from the slight glance he caught of her in the Park, as if she had changed, and certainly for the better. There is always something very attractive to a man who has been much in society, and especially if he had been much sought after, as Walter had been, in the first fresh feelings of a young girl; they

only last for a few weeks probably, for the world with its deceptions and deceits soon works its destroying influence on all that is pure and true; but Walter knew Hilda had never come in contact with anything that was not good and genuine, and, perhaps, it was only a little curiosity that made him anxious to see more of her. However, he gave up the idea of seeing her then, for he thought it would look marked; besides, he would probably see her on Thursday, and if not, he should see her at the drawing-room, for he would go on purpose. So he sauntered slowly down Piccadilly, wondering whether Hilda had ever thought of him, till he was joined by William Munro, an old friend of his, and they both walked on to their club.

Walter Wentworth was the youngest son of General Wentworth, his father had died when he was about sixteen, leaving his mother with three daughters and two sons,

the eldest son died two or three years after his father. Walter studied for the bar, and was able to live tolerably comfortable on the occasional briefs he had, added to the few hundreds a year left him by his father. His mother had died two years before we first saw him at Burwood. All his sisters were well married, the eldest to Mr. Kerrison, a man of some little property, and who, on his marriage, bought himself a small estate in the south of England; the second to a Colonel Makinnon; the youngest to a Monsieur Duverney, a Frenchman, and they lived constantly on his own estate in Brittany.

Walter was not only the youngest son, but the youngest child. He had been his mother's favourite, and, as is generally the case, probably cared less for his mother than her other children; but he felt her death at the time very severely. Nature had been very bountiful in showering down her best

gifts on him, beauty and talent. He had a firm, strong will, and there was no end Walter Wentworth ever intended or wished to gain that he did not succeed in. He had no fortune to speak of; but his voice had given him the entrée to all the best houses in London, where, perhaps, as a poor younger son, he would otherwise not have been made so welcome. He knew this, and he took care to make himself doubly sought after, by being very often engaged when he knew he was particularly wanted. He was too poor to marry without money, and he was too proud to marry for money.

He was not sure whether Hilda had money or not, he had never for an instant thought of marrying her, but he would have been very glad to be the first to receive her first affections. He knew when he chose he could attract any young girl, he almost commanded it, when he liked; but he did not de-

liberately mean to try and make Hilda care for him to gratify his own vanity. Without his knowing it, there was a recollection of her speaking, loving eyes that had haunted him ever since she raised them at dinner, the first time he saw her at Burwood. The fact of not seeing her to-day, when he expected to do so, had been an opposition rather dangerous, he did not know it, but that only made it more so. He would have laughed at any one who had told him that he was vexed at not having seen her, and scorned himself had he been obliged to admit it.

CHAPTER IV.

HILDA and her uncle had just come in from their early ride on Thursday morning, the day fixed for Lady Damer's concert. David had joined them in the Park, so that when she came in there was that gloomy look her face always assumed either when he was present, or expected, or had just left.

They went into the breakfast-room, where Lady Fordyce was sitting reading the newspaper. There were several letters and cards laying on the table. It was a fine, bright, sunny day, and the sun was shining into the room.

"How much pleasanter to-day would be at Burwood than here," said Sir William, as he sat down on a chair near the door and began playing with his riding-whip.

"Let us go back, uncle," said Hilda.

"Why, Hilda, what is the matter this morning? you don't look as if you had just been riding, you generally come in so cheerful and happy," said Lady Fordyce.

"Do I look very cross, dear aunt?" said Hilda, and she smiled as she spoke.

"Not now, my child, but you certainly did when you came in."

"We have just left David," said Sir William, "he wanted to know if you were going to Lady Damer's to-night."

"I did not intend going, but Mr. Wentworth—by the bye, I quite forgot to tell you he called the other morning."

Hilda jumped up and said, "When did he call, dear aunt, did you see him?"

"Yes, my dear," answered her aunt, quite

unconscious of Hilda's anxious look, and sudden interest in the conversation, "and he asked if we were going to this concert to-night; I thought it would be a very crowded one, and that it would not do to take you, but he said it was to be quite a small affair."

"Oh, do go, aunt, I should like it of all things," said Hilda, with an eager look.

"Well, dear, I will go if you like. Shall you see David, Sir William, this afternoon? because, if so, you can let him him know that we shall go."

"Why need you let him know? he can go if he likes or not," said Hilda, in rather a glum tone.

"Why, it is right, my dear, he should know where you go, especially when he asked about it. Go and take your habit off, and if you will get your bonnet on I will walk with you to Madame Devy's this morning, instead of your going into the gardens."

Hilda gathered up her habit and went out of the room. She was full of thoughts about the evening. When she got to her room, she told her maid she should wear her white dress, and white camelias in her hair. It was the first time she had ever taken the least interest in what she wore, and Strange thought it must be some very special party that Miss Chichester should care what she put on. The day seemed very long to her; she thought her aunt would never have done talking to Madame Devy about trains, lappets, and feathers; and then in the afternoon, when they drove out, they went to Edward Square to see Mrs. Chichester; Hilda thought her aunt stayed longer than usual, she never felt a visit to her mother irksome before. And to wind up, Lady Fordyce thought it but right to call in Grosvenor Place and let them know, in case Sir William had not made their arrangements about the evening. The Gra-

hams were all at home, they had just come in.

"We have come to tell you we are going to Lady Damer's to-night," said Lady Fordyce.

"Oh, then, David, you will go, of course," said Mrs. Graham.

"Well, I don't know," said David, "do you wish me to go, Hilda?"

"Not the least," said Hilda, who was quite indifferent about it, "go or stay, whichever will please you most."

"You are certainly a most matter-of-fact pair of lovers," said old Mr. Graham, "most accommodating."

"However, I think David ought to go, even if we don't," said Mrs. Graham, "but I see no reason why we should not all of us be there—to guard our treasure here," and Mrs. Graham turned affectionately round to Hilda; but no reply came from Hilda, she was turning over the leaves of a new

novel lying on the table, and seemed unconscious any longer of what they were saying.

"Very well, so let it be settled," said Lady Fordyce, "and now we must go, come Hilda."

Hilda heard this time, closed her book immediately, and wishing them a collective good-bye rushed down the stairs after her aunt. There was still the tedious dinner to go through, before she could begin active preparations for the evening; but that, like every other good and evil in life, passed, and she went up to dress.

Strange had never found her young mistress so difficult to please as to-night, nothing she did was right, and by the time she was dressed, Hilda felt most thoroughly dissatisfied with herself.

"This dress fits abominably, aunt, does it not?" said Hilda, as she walked into the drawing-room.

"No, my dear, I think if you com-

plain of it you must be very difficult to please."

"And then," said Hilda, "I am sure Strange has put these camelias all crookedly in my hair, one side hangs so much lower than the other."

"I cannot see that they are crooked, but if you think so, there is time to alter them, no doubt, for your uncle is not down yet."

"How long he is dressing to-night," said Hilda, "shall I go and tell him you are ready?"

"No, dear, there is plenty of time, I dressed early that I might write a note to your mother before we started, to ask her and Arthur to dine with us to-morrow."

"Is any one else coming?"

"I believe your uncle asked Sir James Pocock, but I am not sure."

Sir William at last came down, and they were very soon in a line of carriages that promised anything but a quiet party at Lady

Damer's. They were some time getting up to the door, and Lady Fordyce half regretted she had come. But there was no help for it now; their names were bawled out as they walked into the hall, and they were, as soon as they had taken their cloaks off, passed on by name from one servant to another up the staircase, till they reached the room where Lady Damer was standing at the door to receive her guests.

"How kind of you to come, Lady Fordyce, I am quite delighted; and so charmed to make the acquaintance of your niece!" said Lady Damer, shaking hands with them as if they were her dearest friends, "you will find plenty of seats in the far room," she added, as she turned to some other arrivals, with some new form of welcome to receive them.

They passed on as they were told, and came to the room where the music was. A song had just been finished, and there was

that hum of applause that one hears occasionally in a drawing-room.

"Who is that girl in white just come in? There, she is standing by that elderly gentleman. She is very peculiar-looking; not exactly pretty, is she?"

This was said by a slim-looking youth of about twenty, to a stout little man standing by his side.

"I don't know who she is, I have never seen her before. But what glorious eyes she has!" said the stout little man.

Hilda was not looking her best to-night. It is very often the case, that when there is the desire to look well, that very desire, written on the face, destroys the power of doing so. No one had spoken to her, she had not seen any one she knew yet, but Lord and Lady Willesden in the distance; and a gulf might have been between them for the chance there was of their coming within talking distance. Hilda began to regret that she had

come. She had not been there yet a quarter of an hour, and yet, if she had been told so, she would not have believed it, for she thought it a very long time, and almost time to be going away.

Presently, there was a pause, and she turned to see who was going to sing, but she was so seated she could not see their face. Presently, the voice spoke for itself. She had heard it once, she never could mistake it. She felt sure it was Mr. Wentworth.

So he was there, but had not even taken the trouble to look for her, and say how d'ye do! She listened, but without any pleasure; she longed for it to be over; she could not bear to hear his voice, and not see him. She scarcely knew when it had stopped.

"I am very glad to see you thought better of your first resolve, Lady Fordyce, and that you have come," said Mr. Wentworth, shaking hands with Lady Fordyce; he turned and bowed to Hilda, who was sitting next her.

"Have you been here long, Miss Chichester? I have only this moment come; at least, just in time to do my part in the evening's performance."

"Yes, it seems a very long time that we have been sitting here," answered Hilda. She looked up at him as she spoke—it seemed as if he had grown taller, it was such a long way for her to look up—but his eyes were so intently fixed on hers, that she dropped them immediately, and felt the colour rise to her temples. He made no answer, but presently some one moved from a chair behind her, and Mr. Wentworth lost no time in taking possession of it, and leaning over the back of hers, was able to talk without making Hilda break her neck in looking up to answer him.

"I thought you had quite forgotten me, Miss Chichester, it is more than a year since I spent those very pleasant days at Burwood."

She made no reply, but he knew by her silence he was not forgotten, and her eyes said so, too. She could not help her eyes, they were dreadful tell-tales.

"Are you going to sing any more to-night?" she asked, presently.

"No; I should not have promised to come at all, but that I hoped to meet you," he answered, almost in a whisper; but every word was distinct enough to Hilda.

He jumped up, and offered his chair to a lady who had been giving him every possible hint during the last five minutes, but which, though he had seen, he had not chosen to take notice of sooner.

"Do you want an ice, Hilda?"

Hilda turned to see where the question came from, and David stood before her.

"No, thank you," she answered abruptly.

Lady Fordyce was more in need of some refreshment, for she accepted David's rejected arm, and went down with him.

Walter glided into her vacant seat.

"I shall keep this for your aunt till she returns."

Hilda smiled one of her bright happy smiles, that lighted up her whole countenance.

"I have been beset with enquiries about you," he continued, "there are at least a dozen men ready to shoot me for knowing you when they don't."

"That is rather hard, you are not responsible for that misfortune," she replied.

"But you are, for ruining their peace of mind."

"Have you heard lately of our dear old friend, Mr. Western?" asked Hilda, much delighted at having thought of something not very foolish to say.

"Yes, I heard about a fortnight ago. He lives in hopes, from year to year, of being able to resign his appointment, and pass the remainder of his days in England."

"How I should like to see him again! I am sure I should know him, though it is thirteen years since we left Calais, and I have not seen him since; for the only time he came to town, I happened to be in Scotland with my uncle and aunt."

"He never writes without mentioning you or your brothers. Who is this dreadfully ugly woman squeezing her way up to you?"

"Where?" said Hilda, "I don't see her."

"There, close behind that ghostly, satanic-looking man."

"Oh, don't you know them?" said Hilda, in an under-tone, for they were very near her, "that is Mrs. Phillips, my aunt's daughter, and her husband. I am so sorry they are here!"

"Why? Don't you want to speak to her? Take my arm, and let me take you down stairs."

"Oh, no, I must not do that."

And there was no time had she consented,

for Matilda had now got up to her, and she could not have gone without being positively rude.

"Mamma did not tell me you were to be here to-night," she said, "or I should have advised her not bringing you. You should not be at such a party as this before you are presented."

Hilda made no reply.

"Where is mamma?" continued Matilda.

"She has gone down with David for an ice."

Walter had risen and given his chair to Mrs. Phillips. He had moved away, but not far enough to be out of hearing.

"Who is that handsome man I have disturbed flirting with you?"

"Do you mean Mr. Wentworth, who was sitting here just now?"

"Oh! is that the celebrated Mr. Wentworth I have heard so much about? I don't wonder you looked disappointed when he

declined staying at Burwood last winter! You must introduce me."

"I really wish, Matilda, you would not talk such perfect nonsense! I know nothing about his being celebrated; and if you want to be introduced, you must do it yourself, or wait till my aunt comes up to do it for you."

"Dear me, Hilda, I really beg your pardon, I did not mean to offend you; but I think I shall act on your advice, and introduce myself. Oh! here comes mamma, she will do it now in a proper orthodox manner. I am very glad you have appeared, mamma, you are just in time to do me a service. I am dying to be introduced to Mr. Walter Wentworth, and Hilda positively refuses to do it!"

"I wish she had heard what he said of her when she was coming up," thought Hilda, "it would positively relieve me if any one would only just tell her how ugly she is."

"Aunt, I want to talk a little to Lady

Willesden; do you think we could get over there?"

"David will take you, my dear, and I will remain here till he brings you back."

Hilda did not like this mode of going. However, of the two evils, she chose the least, and took David's arm to escort her across the room to where Lady Willesden was sitting.

In the meantime, Matilda had gained her end, and Hilda, as she turned round once, saw Mr. Wentworth standing by the side of Captain Phillips, in conversation with him and his wife.

David never annoyed Hilda with attentions; he did what was asked, and generally, that was all. So he managed to get a chair for Hilda, and placed her next to Lady Willesden; but instead of going, as she hoped and expected he would, he took a seat himself, and began a long discussion on farming with Lord Willesden. They were

obliged, every now and then, to talk very low, because of the music. It seemed an enigma why they went, for neither of them had listened to one note, and, indeed, seemed to think it a great relief the moment it was over, and the restraint on their talking gone.

The Willesdens knew of the engagement between Hilda and her cousin—they were such old friends that Lady Fordyce had told them. Lady Willesden thought that Hilda must naturally prefer talking of David to any other subject; so she began by saying how wonderfully he had improved during the last few years. It was a remark that did not actually require an answer, and Hilda made none; but Lady Willesden certainly expected one.

"How delighted his father and mother must be that they are to have such a dear little daughter-in-law."

Still no answer.

Poor Lady Willesden thought, perhaps,

Hilda was shy, so she asked her this time a direct question.

"Are you to live entirely in Scotland, my dear, when you are married?"

"I don't know, Lady Willesden, nothing is settled yet; you know we are not really engaged. I am not to be engaged till the end of the season."

"Why, I thought you were to be married then!"

"Well so it was arranged; but still, we are not to be engaged. Who is that going to sing now? Can you see? I wish we could get a little nearer the piano."

"It is, I think, Mr. Wentworth; yes, we might go closer. He sings remarkably well, it is quite a treat to hear him. I will ask Lord Willesden and your cousin to get seats for us nearer."

"Oh no, dear Lady Willesden, let us try by ourselves, don't let us disturb them. I am sure they would rather stay where they

are; you and I can manage it quite well. I will take such care of you!" said Hilda, smiling.

The old lady was willing enough to do as she was asked. She was not sorry to move, for she had been sitting the whole evening, and she never liked disturbing her husband when he was quiet and comfortable.

So they moved slowly with the crowd; but it was so slow, that the song was over before they had reached the piano, and Mr. Wentworth, as was always his custom the moment he had finished, left the instrument. He always thought people when they remained at or near it afterwards, wished to be asked again.

Hilda saw him move away, and go towards the part of the room where she had been sitting with Lady Willesden. She was vexed with herself now for not having remained where she was; she felt cross with Lady Willesden, for, she thought, if she had moved

a little quicker, they would have been in time for him to have seen her; for she thought he had gone over on purpose to talk to her, as he had seen her go there.

"We may as well go back to our seats, Lady Willesden, if we are fortunate enough to find them still empty," said Hilda, "as the music is over, and it is so warm here."

"I really could not squeeze through that dreadful crowd again, my dear; we had better try and get to your aunt, I see her a little further on, and then we can ask Sir William to go and tell Lord Willesden where we are."

Hilda found there was no use in being cross, it would not mend matters, and she was not sorry to get back to her aunt, and would ask her to go home.

They were some minutes getting the few steps that yet separated them from Lady Fordyce. She happened to be near the piano, where, of course, all who could, got

near, and so she was hemmed in on all sides.

"At last I have got up to say how d'ye do to you, my dear Lady Fordyce, and I have brought your niece back to you. We were trying to get up and hear that charming Mr. Wentworth sing, but we could not manage it."

"Where have you left David?" said Lady Fordyce.

"He is talking to my husband," said Lady Willesden, "and we thought we would not disturb them."

"Well, I suppose we can go without him," said Lady Fordyce, "Sir William is tired, and I think it is getting late. But he is gone now," said Lady Fordyce, turning round; "well, I suppose we must wait. Take this chair, Lady Willesden, or it will be seized on, else."

"Hilda had to stand, there were no more chairs; she was rather glad, for she

could see better. Sir William returned presently, and after shaking hands with Lady Willesden, he turned to Hilda and said,

"Are you ready to go Hilda, you look tired, and I don't think your aunt will be sorry."

"Quite ready, uncle."

So Lady Fordyce took her husband's arm, and, wishing good-night to Lady Willesden, they began to make their way out of the room, followed by Hilda.

They saw Mr. and Mrs. Graham as they were leaving the room, they had not seen them to speak to the whole of the evening. They stood for a minute now, talking, and told them they must go, it was late, and they were tired. David now came up, and offered his arm to Hilda, which she took, at the same time giving a skimming look over the whole room. She saw what, probably, she was looking for, Walter Went-

worth, he turned his head round just as she was looking, and caught her eye. There is nothing so uncomfortable as to do what is called catching a person's eye; if it is a mere stranger, there is an uncomfortable sensation produced by it. You may talk to a person, and look at them for hours, and yet never catch their eye, and yet it will sometimes occur by merely lifting the eye up unconsciously. It always has a strange effect, there is something of electricity that seems to pass from the one to the other. Hilda experienced a feeling of that kind, as if something had passed through her, her eyes dropped instantly, and she remembered little of what passed afterwards till she found herself in the cloak-room, standing by a mountain of cloaks and shawls of every description; her uncle and aunt at one end of the room looking, the one for his hat the other for her shawl, and David in the dis-

tance at the other end, she supposed, looking for hers.

"May I find your cloak, Miss Chichester?" she started as if she were awoke from a dream, "have you a number, because I can find it directly if you have?"

"Yes, twenty-five, I think."

And presently Walter Wentworth returned with her white cloak, he put it round her, and in doing so her hand touched his; she again started, and became so white, her dress and face were almost of the same hue.

"Will you take my arm, and let me take you to your carriage?"

She recovered herself in a moment, and took his arm; she did not wish to do so, but she did not know how to refuse.

"I don't know if my aunt is ready," she said.

"We will go round to her and see."

David now came up; he could not find her cloak, he said, and he wished women

would not all wear the same thing, he had taken up at least fifty white cloaks, which, of course, he thought must be her's, each time some one had stopped him and claimed it as their's.

"I have it, thank you, David," said Hilda.

"Then you might have told me, and not left me overhauling everyone's things for you when you had it."

"I found it for Miss Chichester," said Walter Wentworth, "she only this moment has recovered it."

Lady Fordyce was now ready, and as their carriage was called out, she took Sir William's arm to go.

"Good-night," said David, "as you don't wan't my help I can go up-stairs again."

"Why, where's Hilda?" said Sir William, turning round.

"I am here, uncle," answered Hilda, "close behind you."

He looked at her, and then at Walter Wentworth, "Oh, you've got Mr. Wentworth have you, very well, we must make haste, or the carriage will drive off again."

"We will follow you," said Mr. Wentworth, thinking it necessary to make some reply. "Do you ride every morning?" he asked hurriedly of Hilda, as they were walking through the hall.

"Yes, every morning," she said.

"At what time?"

"From about nine till eleven."

They were now at the carriage, he helped her in, and wished her good-night in a cold, formal manner, and bowed to Sir William and Lady Fordyce.

The carriage drove off as she saw him hurrying up the stairs. Now, at last, the day had come to an end. Hilda had thrown her head back in the carriage and closed her eyes, and remained so till they stopped at their house in Park Lane. She got out,

and after a hurried good-night to her uncle and aunt, went to her room. Her maid was standing waiting for her. Hilda longed to get rid of her and to be alone; she let her undress her patiently enough, but when she began taking the flowers out of her hair, and doing it, as if her existence depended on not disturbing a single leaf, she said impatiently, "Oh, make haste, Strange, I am very tired." Then she would put her bracelets away, and then she must cover up the dress, the dust would get on it if it were left till morning, "And what would my lady say if she went into Miss Chichester's room in the morning, and found all her things strewed about the room, she must make it tidy." But all things must have an end, and so did Strange's obstinate tidying fit, and it was with the greatest relief Hilda saw her prepare to depart, and heard her usual, "Is there anything more, Miss?"

And now Hilda was alone, and she asked

herself, why was she so anxious to be by herself? What had made her so impatient with Strange? Why had she felt so annoyed once or twice during the evening at such ridiculous trifles that made her seem now quite childish? She could not answer herself, she did not know. She was sitting at her dressing-table, with her two elbows resting on it, and her head resting on her hands; her jet-black waving hair was hanging down loose over her shoulders, for she had not allowed Strange to stop and do it up. She felt restless and uneasy; presently she looked up and saw her face reflected in the looking-glass before her. She was startled by her own looks, there was something in her eyes as she suddenly raised them, that reminded her of Walter Wentworth's. They were not, indeed, very unlike, they both had them large and deep blue; but there was a pleasing, loving look in Hilda's that was not in his; her eyes seemed

to ask for love, his to command it. She remembered what she felt when she saw him looking at her as they were leaving the room at Lady Damer's, and, with the recollection, the same feeling came over her. She covered her eyes over again with her hands, and remained so till she saw the grey light of morning breaking through the thick darkness that covered the sky. She got up, and went to the window, and opened it, but the air felt cold and damp, so she closed it gently for fear of disturbing any one, and went and laid down on her bed. She soon fell asleep, a deep, heavy, unrefreshing sleep, from which she awoke the next morning, scarcely less tired than she was the night before.

When Walter Wentworth returned to the still well-filled rooms, after placing Hilda in her carriage, he was stopped at the door by the stout little man who had remarked Hilda when she first arrived at Lady Damer's.

"Wentworth, I have been trying all the

evening to get at you to ask you who that pale, dark girl is, you were talking to once or twice."

"Why, Quain, you, who know everybody, how is it you ask me who know so few?" answered Walter.

"Just because if I ask I shall know, but at present I don't, and you do," said Mr. Quain.

"She is a Miss Chichester, a niece of Sir William Fordyce's," answered Walter.

"There is something very strange about her, but very fascinating, I could scarcely take my eyes off her all the evening. That stripling Lord Borton does not admire her. Has she money?"

Walter did not answer, he appeared not to hear, and presently, seeing some other friends, moved on to speak to them.

"I really think Wentworth is in love with that girl," said Mr. Quain to his young friend Lord Borton, who came sauntering up.

"What girl, any girl worth looking at?" asked his lordship.

"No, Borton, you thought 'not exactly' pretty, it was the one you noticed when we first came in."

"Wentworth is welcome to her, she looked a cold, haughty creature; but I suppose she has money, or he certainly would not be so disinterested as to fall in love with her. Wentworth is a very cautious fellow, depend upon it, he looks well before he leaps."

"Who are you making out so very careful?" said Lady Damer coming up. She was a short, stout woman about fifty, very much painted, her eyebrows were pencilled, her cheeks rouged, and the rest of her face powdered white, but she got herself up very well, and passed for forty.

"Your favourite Wentworth," said little Mr. Quain. "Borton, here, declares he won't fall in love with a lady who was here to-night,

unless she turns out to be as rich as an Eastern princess."

"And who is the lady?" asked Lady Damer.

"A Miss Chichester I think Wentworth said her name was, when I asked him—a niece of Fordyce's."

"A very charming girl, I thought her," said Lady Damer, evading all allusions to the subject of mercenary love-making; and she went on to another group to say something civil to all her guests in turn.

Nearly everyone was gone, but the Phillips' were amongst those remaining. Mrs. Phillips always stopped to the last, if she had not met with some obliging friend to drive her home. Tom could always walk; but they kept no carriage, and so they stayed and stayed till all hope was over of a friendly lift being given her.

The next morning, when Hilda went down to the breakfast-room, she found it

still empty—she was the first. She went to the window, but she could not see much, the trees in Apsley Gardens prevented any view from the lower rooms, and there was nothing passing at that hour but a few empty cabs. The "Times" was laying on the table, she took it up, but there was nothing interesting enough to fix her attion. She then took up the "Morning Post," a paper her aunt made a special point of taking whenever she was in town; it was more amusing, the parties that had taken place, and the parties that were to take place, all had their space of room allotted to them. In the former, Hilda saw a paragraph giving an account of Lady Damer's concert, where she read her own name for the first time in print. It was novel enough to be rather a pleasure to her; and as she went on, and came to the account of the performers, professional and amateur, she glanced rapidly over till she saw Mr.

Wentworth's name mentioned with great eulogium. When she had finished this, she laid the paper down again, it had no more in it she cared about. Her uncle came in presently.

"Your aunt not down yet!" he said, "I ordered the horses to be round at half-past nine, and it is near that already; no breakfast ready, and you not ready yet?"

"Oh, I shall be ready in five minutes, uncle. Shall I go up and dress now, and then I shall have nothing to do but eat my breakfast, which won't take me very long?"

Her uncle thought she had better, so she went, and in little more than the five minutes she said she should be, she came down in her habit and her hat, riding-whip and gloves in her hand. Lady Fordyce was down and had ordered breakfast, and the horses were at the door, so there was not much time to spare for eating it. Sir

William, like every true lover of horse-flesh, could not bear to see them kept waiting. Hilda would have gone willingly without any, but her aunt insisted on her taking some. Hilda therefore nearly scalded herself by drinking some hot tea, and nearly choked herself by swallowing toast, which she had no appetite for. But they were ready now, so as Spitfire was led up to the door, the groom held his head, and Hilda, with the help of her uncle's hand, gave one spring and was firmly seated on him. She leant down to stroke his neck and speak to him, for he was fidgetting a little, he knew her voice instantly, and tossed his head out of the groom's hold.

"Never mind him," said Hilda, "I have the reins," and she turned him round to go next her uncle.

They walked quietly through the short bit of Park that led them to Rotten Row, and then, giving their horses their heads as soon

as they entered it, they started off at a brisk canter, and only pulled in when they were at the other end of it.

It was a lovely morning. A fresh, soft breeze, and the sun shining brilliantly. Hilda felt all the better for the exercise.

"Well, Spitfire, do you feel as jolly as I do?" she said, patting her horse's glossy neck, "what a glorious canter that was, uncle! It has made me feel all right, for I was rather stupid from last night's dissipation."

"You look like yourself again," said Sir William—or, he might have said, like your best self—for she looked so happy, it was not often her face wore such a bright look. The quick pace they went at had given her a little colour, and her eyes looked larger and deeper than usual.

The ride was beginning to fill now, and they met many of their bowing acquaintances.

Hilda was getting too impatient to continue at a slow pace very long, and Spitfire caught her fidgettiness, or she teazed him till he became so.

"Shall we go?" she said. "Spitfire is fresh this morning, and will be glad of another canter."

They went over the bridge, quite round the Park, and back again into Rotten Row. Still, Hilda had seen no one, and saw no one she cared to see. She scarcely knew why she expected it, but she certainly did think every moment she should see Walter Wentworth.

"We will go round the Park once more," said her uncle, "and then we must go in."

The round was made, and still she saw nothing of him. And they were to go in. It could not be helped; and after all, what did it matter whether she saw him or not. She did not know. She only knew she felt

disappointed, and angry with herself for being so foolish as to think Mr. Wentworth would be so fond of riding as to be out at that hour. And her happy look passed away.

CHAPTER V.

THE drawing-room was on Saturday. There was still a week before Hilda was to be considered 'out.' After all, it seems a great farce, if she was to be seen anywhere beforehand, why she should not be seen everywhere. But Lady Fordyce thought otherwise, and so, though invitations flocked in, only one or two were to be accepted.

To-night, however, she was to go to the opera. Arthur was to escort Lady Fordyce and his sister, because Sir William was engaged out to dinner to a bachelor's party, a thing he rather enjoyed, and, therefore, never, except by necessity, refused. He was equally

glad to escape the opera, and Arthur as glad to be his substitute; for though he often had the opportunity of going, he rarely did so, except when he had as good an excuse as the present, on account of leaving his mother, who was now almost a confirmed invalid, alone.

Hilda and her uncle had, after their morning ride, gone over to Kensington to ask him. His sister urged it very warmly, for fear if he did not go, that David would be obliged, and as her mother was present, she had her to second her. So Arthur promised to go.

It was a good night for any one to go who had never been; Her Majesty was to be present, and the opera a favourite one.

They were rather late in getting in; the first act was nearly over, so that the house was quite full. The royal box was facing theirs.

When Hilda first glanced round, she was bewildered; she thought some fairy had touched her with her wand, and spirited her

away to some of their airy, gorgeous habitations. It was a beautiful sight, and one well calculated to entrance a young girl of seventeen, who had never been even inside a theatre.

Many eyes were instantly turned towards their box, the noise made by their entering, as they did, whilst Grisi was singing amidst a deathlike silence, first attracted notice, and then Hilda herself, for at a distance, she looked more beautiful than near; but she was unconscious of it all.

There were, however, two present in that brilliant throng, who were not, two on whom the admiration Hilda met with caused far different feelings. These were Arthur Chichester and Walter Wentworth.

To her brother it made his heart swell with pride, as he looked round, and saw that *his* sister was beautiful enough to cause so many to turn from the music, which was in itself enough to entrance the least sensitive

lover of the art. And as he gazed at her, he scarcely wondered at it. The purity and innocence of her expression was enough, had she had no other attraction. Arthur was becoming more fond of Hilda than he had ever been before. It was, perhaps, because she had grown fonder of him.

Love, some one says, begets love. Yes, if it is between brother and sister, parent and child, woman and woman, man and man, but never between man and woman, irrespective of natural ties. Then love will beget dislike, contempt, hatred, but never a responding feeling.

Walter Wentworth looked up with the rest to see who could be so devoid of taste as to come in so late, and especially at such an inopportune moment. He too saw, as all else must have seen who took interest enough to watch, that the continued gaze was not caused by a feeling of annoyance at the interruption that the opening and shutting of

doors had occasioned, but by the natural attraction of a young and beautiful woman.

No woman looks to such advantage as on horseback, or in an opera box; if the one does not become, the other is sure to do so. Some look well in both cases, and so did Hilda.

Walter had seen her now both ways. He had seen her a year ago on horseback, but he did not think so much of her then, because there was no one else to open his eyes to her beauty; for it only requires numbers to admire a woman, for the whole world of mankind to do so. He now saw her in an opera box, and saw the many glasses directed towards it. That was enough; he, too, thought her worth turning a minute from Grisi to look at.

As she stood in front of the box for a moment, before she sat down, she looked taller than she really was. Her graceful, small figure was slightly bent forward, her large

eyes were looking about in a dreamy sort of way, as if she could not quite understand it, or as if she had been suddenly awoke from a deep sleep; her lips were slightly parted, and you could see the brilliant white teeth between.

Walter saw Lady Fordyce touch her gently on the arm. Hilda looked suddenly round, and smiled, as if in excuse for her bewilderment, and sat down on a chair Arthur placed for her.

Nothing was lost on Walter, not a look, not a movement. The opera, as far as the music was concerned, was over for him. He was lost in a train of thought, and had any one told him to look how inimitable Robson was, he would have looked, expecting to see Robson in an agony of something.

It will be rather difficult to read his thoughts, but we must try to do so.

He was not in love with Hilda, but his vanity had been flattered. He knew, as well

as if she had told him, that she not only admired him, but that there was a still warmer feeling. He knew it from the very first day he had passed at Burwood. She was too young then, for her, perhaps, to have been aware of it herself; she was still too young and natural for her to disguise it now. Perhaps, even, she did not know herself the real state of her feelings; and yet, he thought, she could not be so visibly affected as he had seen her, without having some consciousness of the cause.

When he asked her at Lady Damer's whether she rode, where and when, he knew perfectly, for Lady Fordyce had told him when he called; but it suited him at the moment to appear very interested, and he knew she would believe he asked that he might meet her. At the moment, he not only intended she should expect him, but he really meant to go. The following morning, he thought it would be as well she should expect him

only, and he determined not to go; it would make her feel still more pleased when she did see him, having met with a disappointment, and it would give him an opportunity of talking to her about it, and so placing matters on such a footing, that without in any way compromising himself, she would, in time, learn to look at it as a matter of course, and, at the same time, she must keep it secret. How could she talk of expecting him here or there? What right would she have to do so? or what right would he have to talk to her in that way?

He knew quite well, that beneath that calm, cold exterior, deep, intensely deep feeling lay, and it was for the pleasure of bringing those feelings into play on his own behalf, that he set about in a selfish, calculating way to gain his point.

Had she had money he would have thought, perhaps, of marrying her, but he had heard from his friend Bingham that she

had none to depend on, so it was useless to think of that; and, moreover, he was not really a man who would wish to marry. He delighted in being sought after; he could not bear to be where he was not appreciated, or what he considered not appreciated, and he knew quite well, as a married man, he would never be half so much thought of as now.

His splendid voice and handsome face had opened most of the best houses in London to him, but if he had a wife to drag about with him everywhere, he thought the everywhere would, in time, become nowhere; but with all this he could not help admiring Hilda very much. Though he was very young himself, he had seen enough of the world to know how soon it spoilt a girl; he knew, or thought, at least, a couple of seasons would make Hilda like the rest of her kind; she would lose that fresh *naïve* manner that was to him a great charm.

He, therefore, wished to strengthen the feeling he knew was there into the deep feeling he thought her capable of. He had studied her well; not a word nor a look had been thrown away. He felt sure his surest way of gaining his point was not taking her by storm. She would probably shrink back, and cease to like him. He must go very slowly and gently, and lead her unconsciously step by step until she was completely subdued.

He never asked himself to what it was to tend when he had succeeded. Probably, had any one put the question to him, he would have said he did not know. It was to tend to nothing. He only now knew that he wished to be the first to gain Hilda's love, and leave all the rest to time and fate. She might, after all, have money from her uncle.

The last act had now commenced, and Wentworth having ascertained Hilda had

seen him, thought it time to go and pay them a visit in their box. He did not mean to stay more than a few minutes, as Arthur was with them, and Arthur and he had not felt drawn to each other very much. Arthur had seen at Burwood what no one else had seen. He had noticed the way Wentworth then appropriated Hilda, when it suited him, and in a way it was difficult to remark without appearing officious, and absurdly so.

Wentworth had that instinctive feeling that Arthur half saw through him; but it was, in truth, only half that Wentworth saw through himself; and, for the sake of that fair girl before him, he would perhaps have stopped, but he never for one instant thought whether he was risking her happiness or not.

He was in the box now. Hilda knew he was coming, from the way he looked up before leaving his seat. She turned round as he opened the door, and was going to hold

out her hand, but he did not offer his to any of them, merely bowing. He knew Hilda had never been at the opera before, but he asked her the question just the same.

"No," said Hilda, "this is the first time, but I hope I shall often come. I did not think it possible there could be such a beautiful sight; and when Grisi was singing, as we first came, for we were rather late, I thought I must have been in a dream. Every one looks so beautiful, too! I see several faces I know that I thought quite plain, and now they seem almost different people."

"Yes, there is nothing like fine feathers to make fine birds, but I do think that the house itself is a great set-off to the audience," answered Wentworth. "Where is Sir William to-night, Lady Fordyce? does he carry his dislike of music so far as to avoid the Opera."

"Not exactly to that extent," said Lady

Fordyce, "but he was engaged out to dinner."

After a few more casual remarks, Wentworth stooped down to Hilda, and said loud enough only for her ears, for he took the opportunity whilst the orchestra was playing loud enough to drown every sound,

"I must wish you good night; will you shake hands with me before I go?"

Hilda looked round in astonishment; she wondered whether he thought she had refused to do so before, that he asked now, but his face wore an expression she had never yet seen, there was something sad in it, that made her say, before she had time to think—

"Why must you go? won't you stay till it is over?"

He waited a moment, and then said, as she looked for an answer,

"Yes!"

She was satisfied, and turned her head

again to the stage, but her eyes saw no more, her ears heard no more; she turned towards the stage mechanically, but she felt very happy. It was now over, and Wentworth waited till Arthur had offered his arm to Lady Fordyce before he gave his to Hilda, for he could not have done so had Arthur not taken Lady Fordyce; and he knew quite well, that unless he himself had offered, Arthur must do so. Arthur was not to know that he could go with them to their carriage, and on this ignorance too he acted, for he offered his other arm to his sister; then Wentworth said,

"Allow me to take Miss Chichester?" and she took his arm.

There was a great crowd, so that Hilda was not sure whether every now and then the crowd did not cause Wentworth to press her arm rather closely.

"You are in a great draught here. I think if we stood a little on one side you would be more out of it."

"We shall lose my aunt and Arthur, I think, if we do not keep them in sight."

"Are you afraid I cannot take care of you?"

"Oh, no, but—"

"But—what?"

Hilda did not know; she thought he must think her very stupid, but he did not; he knew her first impulse had been to say, "It will seem strange for us to move out of their way," but a natural instinct told her she had better leave it unsaid. She was relieved when she heard the carriage being called out. They hurried down the stairs, and she was soon inside it.

"Cannot I put you down, Mr. Wentworth?" said Lady Fordyce, in the hurry of the door banging too.

"Thank you!" and before he could either accept or refuse, the servant opened the door again, the policeman called out, "Drive on, coachman!" Walter jumped in, the door was

closed, and they were off. He sat opposite to Hilda, so he was able to talk to her. Arthur was leaning back in the carriage, and Lady Fordyce was giving him messages for his mother, and telling him to say she might expect her to-morrow to take her to the Regent's Park in the afternoon.

"So you are pleased with the opera you heard to-night?" said Wentworth, leaning forward towards Hilda. "I should like you to hear 'Les Huguenots,' I think the music would delight you very much."

"I know a great deal of the music, and like it exceedingly. I should think if such an orchestra as we had to-night was to play it, it would be glorious."

"I will find out when it is to be performed and will let you know."

"Do you often go?" asked Hilda.

"I have a stall with a friend of mine, William Munro, and we go in turns, or which ever may happen to be disengaged."

"I should not like that. I think sharing anything must be very disagreeable."

"Do you? well, you seem not likely ever to be obliged to share anything; you will always get the whole, I think, should you wish it."

Though the words did not mean much, the look that accompanied them, and which was rendered visible by the carriage passing close to a lamp, meant and said a great deal.

"May I ask your servant to put me down here, Lady Fordyce?"

"Tell him to put you down wherever you wish to go, for it is raining, and you may as well be driven home if you are going there."

"I am going to my club, and as you pass it, I will tell him."

"What can you do at your club at this hour?" asked Hilda.

"Smoke a cigar and drive all unpleasant

thoughts away, and dream of a few happy moments I have passed to-night !"

His hands, which were together for a moment, touched her's as he answered her; it was so slightly and so momentarily, that it might have been an accident. They now drew up at the club that was looking brilliant with lights at every window, as if it was prepared to remain so all night. Walter pressed her hand warmly, but gently, as he left, and as soon as he was out of sight, she with both her hands pushed her hair off her face, and leant her head almost out of window to let the cool air blow upon her brow, and if possible, to let the drops of rain fall on her too.

"I don't like that man, Wentworth," said Arthur, presently.

Hilda never moved any more than if she had not heard it, but she listened attentively.

"Why not, Arthur?" said Lady Fordyce.

"Because I think him too cautious in all

he says and does, not to have some motive for being so."

"Cautious, my dear boy! what a strange term. Why, what can you have seen to make you say so? I thought you scarcely knew him, you always seem as if you were almost strangers to each other."

"So we are, for I never could be on intimate terms with him, if we saw each other daily for the next ten years; there is something in his face that would prevent me ever trusting him."

"Well, I think you are foolish to form such hasty opinions of people. I think him a most gentlemanly, agreeable person; and were I a girl, he is just the sort of man I should fall in love with."

And if so, pray, Lady Fordyce, why did you expose your niece, whom you brought up as much as you could to your own way of thinking and feeling, to such a temptation? Did it never occur to you that if you thought

that of him at your age, that she was very likely to do so at her's? Did you think because you had induced her to promise to marry that heavy, uninteresting rough cousin of her's, that her heart was closed to every one who might take the trouble to knock for the sake of gaining admittance? Even supposing you did, were you wise, before a young girl, to whom you have given your own tastes for a model, to point out one particular individual and say, that one would be your choice were you placed as she is? Occasionally, we want young heads on old shoulders; and it would have been well for you, Lady Fordyce, had you been able to have changed with our friend Arthur, opposite.

The words were not lost on Hilda; Arthur hoped she had not heard them, for her head was still by the window, and she was leaning out even more than before. When she wished her brother good-night, he fancied

there was a degree less warmth in her kiss than usual, and she hurried in without waiting to speak to him as she generally did. He did not know the reason, how could he, so he thought it must be fancy. She, too, was unconscious of any change in her manner, though she knew she felt annoyed with him. It is very strange that, till she heard her aunt make that unfortunate ill-judged remark, she never for an instant considered what her real feelings towards Walter Wentworth were. It was as if a veil had been suddenly wrenched from her eyes. Could she be in love with him? Was what she felt, love? No, how could it be? Love came by degrees, it took a long time to love a person; and she remembered feeling very much the same as she did now, when she heard him sing that little French song, the very first time she had seen him at Burwood. And yet, if it was not love, what was it? Did she not feel happy when he

was by her, and restless and uneasy when he left her? Had she not, wherever she had gone, hoped to meet him? and if she did not, she was bitterly disappointed, and wished to be home again; and if she had, then the time flew too quickly, and she never wearied of staying.

When she drove out, did she not look in all directions in the hope of seeing him? When she rode, had she not always been hoping he would join them, after asking her where she went and when? In fact, had she not unknowingly, in every thought and action made him the leading point? It was no use to shut her eyes to it, she felt it was, and must be—she did love him, she could not help it. She only wondered how she had never thought of it before. And then came the thought of whether he loved her; but that did not trouble her long. Of course he did, or why should he speak to her as he did, and look at her

differently to the way every one else did? She tried to remember all he had ever said to her; it was not difficult, for every word, however trifling, had taken root, and been treasured up; but there was nothing, after all, in what he had said, though at first she thought there was a great deal. No, it all turned on the way it was said; it would not bear repeating unless *he* repeated it; but she was satisfied herself that he must love her.

And now, as her ideas travelled on, there arose a gigantic trouble in her way. David stood before her, and she was his promised wife; but she speedily melted that impediment away, as she would have done a mess of snow by a warm fire. It was true she was his promised wife, but she was not engaged to him, and she was not to be engaged till the end of the season, and this was only the beginning. She would tell her aunt at once she loved Walter Wentworth, and so she could not marry David Graham.

But then, would not her aunt ask if Walter Wentworth had said anything to her to induce her to take such a step? No, that would not do, she must say nothing about him, and only say she could not become David's wife. And then what reason could she give, for, of course, Lady Fordyce would wish to know? She could not give a reason unless she mentioned Walter's name, and that she felt would not do. So she at last, wearied out by thinking, determined to say nothing for the present; there was plenty of time after all, and, perhaps, Walter would say something soon that would enable her at once to speak to her aunt. There would be no harm in waiting a little, but she might do a great deal of mischief if she had not a little patience.

And so, with this decision, and the happy feeling that the consciousness of a deep, true love when first felt always gives, Hilda fell into a calm, untroubled sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

SATURDAY, the eventful day that was to see Hilda presented to Her Majesty, and so, as it were, render her fit, after that ordeal was gone through, to be presented to any of Her Majesty's loyal subjects, arrived.

The week, from the day she had gone to the opera had been a long one, for, at Mrs. Phillips' repeated request that Hilda should not be seen everywhere, as she had been, before being presented, Lady Fordyce had declined all the invitations that were for those days previous to the drawing-room.

Hilda, therefore, had seen Walter Wentworth but once, and then not to speak to

him, only during one of their daily drives. He had called once, but they were out. So to-day was rather hailed with joy by our little heroine, for she thought, the drawing-room over, she could go everywhere, and, of course, she should see him.

As people generally do when they feel pleased, Hilda looked well and happy. She had been desired about a dozen times by her aunt to go up and dress, but as they were not to leave till one, Hilda could not understand, when half-an-hour was the outside of the time she generally took to dress in, why she was to go up at eleven to commence. However, by twelve, Lady Fordyce made her go.

She had not ridden with her uncle that morning, for fear of tiring herself too much, so it had been rather a long one to her; but she amused herself by counting all the parties, morning and evening, that she was to be present at during the ensuing week.

The 'Court Journal' of May, 1849, gave

a full and true account of Miss Chichester's dress, so that any of my readers who are anxious to know it, have but to refer to the paper of that date. All I need say is, that she looked as well as any beautiful girl, beautifully dressed, generally does.

On arriving at the Palace, she felt a little shy at having to walk through that long passage, lined on either side with spectators, and though they were not very formidable-looking people, the feeling that she was, in her turn with others who had passed before her, being gazed at by hundreds of eyes was disagreeable. They soon were at the stairs, and as they were early, there was no great crush.

For some minutes after they were in the first room, Hilda looked round to see if she could distinguish the one face she longed to see. She wished him to see her, for she thought, as so many people had said she was beautiful, that in her present dress, she must look more so than usual; and she cared only

for what he might think, she only wished to be beautiful for his sake.

David Graham, however, saw her if no one else did, and as soon as he could squeeze through the mountains of tulle, and silk, and flowers, he joined them.

Hilda received him more cordially than she had done since their first meeting at Burwood at Christmas. There was no longer that restraint in her manner, or that coldness that took possession of her from the moment she knew she was to be his wife. She had freed herself, and she only waited for the right moment to free him, too. She knew he did not love her, that there would be no sorrow inflicted by her breaking her engagement. Had he loved her, she would have known it by his manner, it was so different to Walter Wentworth's. He had never appeared anxious about meeting her, otherwise than in the straightforward course of events. He

had never told her the moments he passed by her side were happy ones.

No, he did not love her. And she felt so secure and happy in her own thoughts, that she smiled on David as she had never done before.

David was but man after all, so, even if he was not in love with her, it is not strange that, as he gazed on her young, beautiful face, he felt a glow of satisfaction that she was to belong to him, that in a few months she would be his.

"I shall walk up with you as far as the Presence Chamber, Hilda, and see that you behave properly," said David, smiling.

"And mind, my dear," said Lady Fordyce, "you take off your right hand glove before you go in."

"I don't think I am likely to forget that, aunt, for I am sure you have been telling me about it during the whole week."

"Well, I hope not; but I should be glad

if I saw you take it off at once, and then there can be no forgetting."

"Oh, don't be afraid; I will take it off in time, and I will give it to David to hold for me."

They were now beginning to move on, for the doors had been thrown open to admit the general circle.

As they entered the next room, Hilda gave another longing look round, but there was nothing visible to satisfy her.

They were now at the Presence Chamber. Before Hilda knew it, she saw two people spreading out her aunt's train, and before her she saw Her Majesty, surrounded by all the great of the land.

Hilda had not time to think, her head seemed to swim, she was ignorant of everything till bowing her head to kiss her Queen's ungloved hand, she saw her own with her glove on; she looked up suddenly but for an instant—there was no help for it now. She

only trusted it had been unnoticed. She felt thankful when some one rolled up her train, in a manner that would have broken Madame Devy's heart, to judge by the way she had herself handled it, and thrust it over her arm; she saw her aunt's anxious face, and David by her, but she also saw what drove everything and every person out of her mind. She saw Wentworth watching her with his grave, pale face, as if he, too, had been anxious about her. It made her heart beat with such deep joy.

"Hilda, how could you be so thoughtless? I really don't know what to do," said Lady Fordyce, for David had told her she had passed through glove and all.

"Never mind, my dear, you are not the first young lady who has been frightened into forgetting something on such an occasion, and Her Majesty is very lenient."

And the Duke, the hero Duke, patted Hilda on her shoulder as he consoled her with these

words. He was well rewarded for his good nature by the look of gratitude and admiration she turned upon him. His Grace did much more good than he thought, for it calmed Lady Fordyce's vexation at once, and it made Wentworth forget his pre-arranged formal words, and give way for a moment to his own feelings.

"I have been watching you with such anxiety from the moment you came in, but I would not come near you for fear of making you nervous."

People were coming quickly out of the throne-room, and for a few minutes Hilda and Wentworth were on one side as they passed by them, and Lady Fordyce and David on the other.

"Have you?" said Hilda. "I did not see you, and yet I looked everywhere for you."

Her sweet eyes were beaming with love as she looked at him. He must have been of

marble had he not felt some little feeling in return, but if he did, he hid it from himself. He had not wished her to know he had been watching her, but the Duke of Wellington's notice of her had made him forget his intended moves, and he said,

"What made you forget your glove? Lady Fordyce says she told you of it the last thing. Was it your cousin's conversation that was so entertaining?"

A shade of sorrow, mixed with anger, passed over her countenance; he saw it, and noted it. He knew as well as she could tell him, that David could never be amusing enough to her to make her forget anything, but that she was looking for him; he knew it, for he saw her look, but he wanted to make her tell him so. But there he mistook Hilda. If he thought she liked David, why did he trouble himself about her? if he did not, why should he vex her by saying so? She, therefore, made him no answer.

"I have offended you," continued Wentworth; "forgive me, it was unintentional," and he resumed his cold, haughty manner. Could he really believe that she cared for David, or had he heard of their foolish engagement, for so she had considered it since that day week; if so, she would undeceive him as soon as she had the opportunity.

"You have not offended me," she said, for she felt afraid of him when he spoke to her in that tone; "only I was sorry you thought me so foolish as to attribute such a cause for my thoughtlessness."

"Your eyes speak more truly than your lips," said Wentworth, smiling, though he still seemed in a frozen state.

"Do they? and yet I have spoken what I believe the truth."

"Then tell me all the truth. What made you so *distraite?* your eyes were wandering in every direction, when you ought to have been pulling off that guilty glove."

"Were they wandering?" said Hilda, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

"Take my arm," he said, and as she did so, he pressed it gently to him. "Now, tell me." She knew he was looking down at her, but she had not the power to raise her eyes and meet his. "You must tell me who were they looking for?"

"You!"

She did little more than breathe the word, but he heard it, and he again pressed her arm, but he did not speak. He knew now the power he had over her. He felt he could by firmness do what he pleased. He knew, too, that there was fear mingled with her love, but he rather liked that—he would rather encourage it than dispel it; but he felt he must be cautious for a time. He must not say anything she could repeat, or that could be laid hold of; he must do nothing either that would startle her love, for though she was young she was clever, and her love

for him might not yet be so deep but that it might be destroyed.

Why was it that the attraction of a young fresh love was so great, as to lead Wentworth to peril not only her future and its entire happiness, but for all he knew his own too. He thought himself safe; and as far as regarded her, it was surely giving her happiness, for would she not have been miserable had she thought he did not care for her?

When he found himself at home again, and sat down in his more than comfortable room, he felt well satisfied with his morning's work. He had, in fact, gained an admission from Hilda Chichester of her love for him, without having said anything himself. It had not been the mere little word she uttered only that pleased him, it was the way it was said, and that he had to force her to say it; so she evidently felt it was an admission, or why should she have hesitated. Why should she have kept her eyes so steadily fixed on

the ground, if she had not felt a certain degree of something very near akin to shame, when she whispered that little word "you." He took up his engagement-book, and found that there were several where he should probably meet her, but he must be very careful how he acted and what he said.

He must ascertain very clearly how this morning's conversation had taken effect before he took a step further; so he decided to do nothing till chance should throw him across her again. He was quite sure of seeing her on the following Friday, should he not meet her sooner, as on that day he had received an "At Home" from Lady Fordyce, with dancing in the corner; he should, therefore, be able then to have her all to himself for two or three dances, at least; but he might meet her before, and if so, he thought it would be safest and wisest to appear to have forgotten the scene of the morning.

And Hilda, what did she feel? Why,

only that Walter was very exigeant to expect her to tell him what her eyes were looking at, as well as, what was *not* the cause of her wandering thoughts; but she was very happy, she had quite forgotten his freezing manner at one time, and only remembered his dark blue eyes looking fondly upon her. She wondered where they should next meet, she longed to go everywhere on the chance. She longed so to tell her aunt, but there was a something that prevented her. She was afraid of what *he* might say, or what *he* might think if he knew she had told Lady Fordyce; and, moreover, what had she to tell, she considered, and found that really there was still nothing.

There is nothing like happiness to improve one's looks, and it was quite certain Hilda was growing prettier every day; there was a bright sunny smile constantly to be seen, where there generally had been a demure and rather heavy expression.

Lady Fordyce was happy in her darling's happiness. There was a more loving manner, too, towards her aunt, that had not existed before. It was as if her love for Walter had increased her love for all around her, she wanted everyone to feel the same as she did—the same confidence in the future.

Arthur saw all, and grieved over it, for he knew it would be useless to speak. His aunt was annoyed with him the other night because he had not expressed admiration of a man who, in his heart, he believed was a mere fortune hunter. If he spoke to Sir William, he would only "pooh pooh" him, "how could Hilda dream of any one else when she was engaged to David!" If he spoke to Hilda herself, he knew it would but widen the breach that already had been made, by his only passing a remark to his detriment. He thought of nothing else, and his mother noticed his anxious

looks, but though she had on several occasions asked him what was the matter, he answered "nothing," in such a tone, that she knew it was better for her not to press him with any further questions.

He came home one day, rather later than usual—it was the day of Lady Fordyce's party, he was looking more than usually out of sorts. He threw himself on the sofa, and passed his hand through his thick, black, curly hair. He sighed so deeply, it was almost like a sigh occasioned from pain. His mother was in the next room, the door was open, and she had both seen and heard his distress. She came in and sat down by him. She thought it best to be silent, if he had any trouble he wished to confide in her, surely he must know that if she could, she would do all a mother could do for what was to her almost an only child. She waited patiently, still he said nothing.

"I have ordered dinner earlier to-night,"

at length she said, "as Lady Fordyce begged, when she called yesterday, that you would not be later than nine."

"You must go too, mother," said Arthur, abruptly and decidedly.

"I, my dear! oh no, I really could not bring myself to go into such a party as this will be. I don't feel equal to it; I don't mind sometimes going to your aunt's when there are only a few intimate friends, but I have not spirit enough for such an affair as it will be to-night; and I am sorry, as she, with her usual kindness to me, sent me such a beautiful dress, that I might be saved the expence, or, as she said, have no reasonable excuse for not going. But I told her yesterday I was sure I should not."

"But you must," said Arthur, "I have a particular reason why you should; so make up your mind to go."

"A particular reason! What can you mean?" and his mother looked in his face,

to see if she could read more than he chose to tell her. She wondered whether any one was to be there he particularly wished her to see; some one in whom he felt so warm an interest, that he would like his mother's opinion. But if so, why should he look so sad? It could not be that.

"Unless, Arthur, it is really something of importance, don't ask me to go; for I dislike the idea very much."

"Do you call your child's happiness important?" he said, in a hard tone, and his eyes flashing.

"Why, what do you mean, Arthur? you know your happiness is dearer to me than anything in life."

"Mine! it is not for me I ask you to go, it is on Hilda's account."

"Hilda! what of her? She was here today, looking happier and more beautiful than I ever remember to have seen her. Surely you are mistaken!"

"No, mother, I am not mistaken. I heard casually to-day what has confirmed my growing fears of these last two months. You remember Mr. Wentworth—I don't know if you have seen him since we were at Burwood, but you can't forget him. Well, I have seen, from the time of her first coming to town, that he has been paying her that quiet but devoted attention that is sure to attract a girl, especially one so young. I, also, have seen that Hilda has completely fallen under his influence. I have watched her very narrowly, especially lately, and I believe her whole heart and soul are given up to him—and she bound to become the wife of another man!"

Arthur waited a moment.

"But why," said his mother, "have you not spoken sooner? Why did you not tell Lady Fordyce?"

"Because the only time I ever mentioned him, she told me I misjudged him because I

called him calculating, or something of the kind, and that I ought not to form hasty opinions. Hilda was present, and I have seen, from her manner to me since, that she resents what I said. Besides, I could not make Lady Fordyce see it as I do, she could not watch them as I did."

"But your uncle, you surely could have spoken to him."

"My dear mother," said Arthur, impatiently, "you surely know my uncle well enough by this to know what his answer would have been. He would have told me not to worry myself about trifles; surely Hilda was safe under his roof, and her aunt able to take care of her. No, there is never any use in speaking to people on disagreeable subjects, unless it is to render them less so."

"But I don't see now what good it will do, my going to this ball to-night."

"It will do this good; people who sit quietly in a room, and never move, see more

than any others, and I want you to judge with your own eyes, and if you notice anything in Wentworth's manner that is in any way too marked, you can then speak to my aunt; she will take it differently from you, and besides, you have more right to do so than I have. I shall speak to Hilda if I have an opportunity. And another thing I think it will be as well to do, and that you can do better than any one else, tell him of Hilda's engagement to David."

"That seems to me a very good thought," said Mrs. Chichester. "Well, under these circumstances, I suppose I must go. But you have not told me yet what you heard today that you say confirmed you in your fears."

"I was at the club just now, and there were two men who had their backs turned to me, and so did not see me, and the one said,

"'They say that Wentworth is spooney upon Sir William Fordyce's niece."

"'Is it that beautiful girl I saw him talking to last night,' said the other, 'if so, you should reverse it, and say she is spooney on him; why she looked at him with those wonderful eyes of hers, as a cat watches cream; but it won't do. I doubt if the woman breathes that he could bring his heart to love, unless she were a breathing diamond. When Wentworth marries, he will sell himself.'

"I got up to leave the room instantly for fear they should see me, and only heard, as I was going out, the first speaker say,

"'Poor girl!'

"I could not bear the idea of my sister being pitied, and rushed out as fast as I could, and came home."

"I hope," said Mrs. Chichester, "all will be made right. When once he knows she is engaged, he will desist from going to the house, and Hilda will soon forget him."

"You may be right in the first; he may

think it prudent to withdraw, but I doubt Hilda forgetting him. She has a cold exterior, but it hides a fond, true, loving heart, and when once she loves, I doubt much if anything would ever destroy it. She has strong passions, and, I believe none who has not, can understand those who have."

"Well, we must hope, my dear, and I will go now and see about getting my things ready, for I shall have to dress directly after dinner."

Mrs. Chichester wished her daughter had not been so foolish, she only termed it folly, for she did not believe in such intensity in a young girl's love as Arthur did; she had forgotten her own feelings at that age, and only remembered her deep wife love for her beloved George. All her former feelings had been merged into the latter. Besides, it was not possible for Rose to feel the same fondness or anxiety about Hilda, who from her always living away, had

naturally become estranged to her; she was very fond of her, but their interests were not the same, nor their pursuits. All her love had gradually centered in Arthur. Whilst Frank was at home, he had a very large share, for, from his delicate health, and naturally affectionate disposition, he had clung much to his mother; but she had become accustomed to his absence, and now his letters satisfied her. Hilda, too, had never been very demonstrative; she often seemed indifferent about a thing that she would really be very interested in, and her mother liked people to show what they felt. Arthur was much more like his mother in outward appearances, at all events, and he was more identified with her than the others. Being older, too, she had always been guided by his opinion, and generally taken his advice. She thought him, however, too warm on the present subject. She saw no occasion for so much anxiety, a girl in love is such a

very common thing; but, however, he had said she must go, and must watch, so she did go, and, as far as she could, did watch.

CHAPTER VII.

When Hilda awoke on Friday morning, she jumped quickly out of bed and ran to the window to see what kind of day it was, she only then remembered weather would not have much effect on that day's proceedings. Hitherto, at least previous to her coming to town, all her anticipated pleasures had depended on what kind of day it might turn out, and so her first impulse on waking, from mere habit, feeling something unusual was to be, she looked to see whether the sun was to shine or not.

The same habit that had made her first

go to the window, also caused her to awake very early, it was scarcely six by her clock. She went to the mantel-piece where the clock stood to hear if it had not stopped, but it was ticking on, in its own quiet regular way, dead to all knowledge of how much at times life, age, even more than life, depended on its mark of time. What could she do? was the thought that first crossed her mind, that she might get through the long hours till breakfast. Go to sleep again, was apparently the most approved one, for she went back to her bed and laid down; but her big eyes remained open for so long, that it was very clear sleep did not mean to close them again merely to accommodate her; she seemed to have discoved that too, and again rose, it was now half past six, she could not expect Strange would knock till nearly eight, she had had trouble enough to bring her to that hour even. So she put on her dressing-gown and sat

down by her window, which she opened, and remained for some time not thinking, if such a thing is possible; but, at all events, her thoughts were so trivial they could not be called thoughts; she was watching the clouds of mist as they seemed to vanish from off the trees in the Park into air.

Presently, the distinct echoing sound of a horse's step in perfect stillness made her think how nice it would be riding at that hour in the cool fresh air, before the smoke of all the chimneys had contributed to render it thick and full of blacks. She was not one to think for no purpose, scarcely before she had quite come to the end of that thought, she had reached her room door, and opening it, she walked along the narrow passage that led to her uncle and aunt's rooms. She knocked very gently at the door, as if she was afraid of waking them, but as her object was not to be obtained without, she knocked loud enough for a

"come in" to proceed in a stifled sleepy tone from within.

"It is such a lovely morning, uncle, that I have come to know if you will ride before breakfast instead of after, it is nearly seven, now," said Hilda, from without.

"Yes, my dear, your uncle will go with you if you wish," came from a more wakeful voice, "when will you be ready?"

"By half-past seven, auntie. Will you ring and order the horses?"

Hilda thought she should call down a stable full of ill-will upon her, were she known to be the originator of such an atrocious proceeding as wanting the horses at that hour.

"Yes, dear, I will ring directly," and so that kind, indulgent, foolish woman, turned out and rang her bell; and when her maid came, which she did in the course of twenty minutes, desired Sir William's and Miss

Chichester's horses might be at the door by half-past seven.

"What has given you such country notions, Hilda, this morning?" said her uncle, as he mounted her on Spitfire.

"I happened to awake very early, and it seemed so dreadful to be in bed, with the sun shining brightly, that I got up; and it looked so cool and nice, I was quite sure it would do us both good to have a gallop, and we never get one scarcely, for so many things are in our way later to prevent it; but now there is but a solitary creature, which looks at this distance like a man, so we have plenty of room, and let us be off at once for fear there should come others to impede us."

The horses were fresh, quite ready to go at any pace their riders chose, so they were soon at full speed, skimming the ground down Rotten Row, and raising the loose earth in a cloud behind them. The lonely man in front, for so he proved to be, did not hear

them till they were within a few yards of him. He held his reins carelessly at the moment, and before he could gather them up, they flew past him, starting his horse, which followed them at full speed. He had got him well in hand now, but the brute was hard-mouthed and obstinate, and he could not pull him in till he arrived at the end of the Row. The man looked savagely enough at the delinquents.

"I am afraid, uncle, we frightened that man, or rather his steed," said Hilda.

"Did we though, really?" and Sir William was going to add, "I think I must apologize to him," when the injured party rode up, and lifting his hat out of respect to the lady, said to Sir William—

"You are not aware, Sir, perhaps, that such furious riding is not allowed here, and that had any of the Park-keepers seen you, you would be liable to a penalty."

"I assure you if I startled your horse,

which I fear I did, I apologize most sincerely; I trust, however, you were occasioned no other inconvenience."

The man was not a coward, and did not, therefore, wait to be thought so; besides, he had caught sight of Hilda's face, and remembered her as having met her out, and heard who she was.

"I believe I have the honour of addressing Sir William Fordyce?" he said, in a little more conciliatory tone. "You must pardon my haste at the moment, and excuse a man being a little ruffled when he has just escaped an ignominious fall from his horse."

"Indeed! I am very sorry, it was very thoughtless of us to ride at such a pace. But, you have the advantage, for I do not know who I have the pleasure of speaking to."

"Lord Borton," said his Lordship. Sir William bowed. "We are members of the same club."

"Yes," said Sir William, "I remember your face now, though I did not your name; and I hope our acquaintance, began in so unlucky a manner, may prove the more agreeable in future."

"May I be allowed to call on Lady Fordyce?" said his young Lordship. He was only just of age, thought himself a man, but acted like a schoolboy.

"Certainly, and let it be to-night about ten o'clock; we have a dance, I believe, or something of the kind, and I shall be happy to see you."

"I shall be delighted; and now I will say good morning, and I shall keep clear of you when on horseback for the rest of my days." He rode off, first bowing to Hilda, and then to Sir William.

"Well, that is a novel way of making a man's acquaintance," said Sir William.

"I have seen him at a great many places," said Hilda.

"Oh, then, I suppose he knew me as your uncle; that is the way I owe the glory of being a known man, eh?" and he turned round, laughingly, to Hilda. "But why did he not speak to you?"

"I don't know him, uncle; I have never spoken to him, only I have met him and heard his name, that's all. Now he's gone, let us have a gallop back."

"What, and kill a man this time, or be taken up for over-riding?"

"No, there's no man to kill; and that stupid boy talked nonsense about the keepers."

"Well, if we are, you shall appear for us both," said her uncle, not sorry for having the excuse of pleasing, to take a gallop himself; and so they flew back again, if possible, faster than they went. It really looked like flying, and, I think, must have felt like it. They met with no further disaster, but Sir William would not risk it again, as there

were now one or two stray equestrians appearing at the different entrances to the ride. They were home about nine.

Lady Fordyce was horrified when she heard of Lord Borton's equanimity being upset, and very thankful she was that nothing else was; but she made Hilda give her a promise that she would never again ride in that very dangerous manner.

Breakfast was over, and Hilda had succeeded in getting the time over till ten o'clock passed without any great *ennui*, but there were yet twelve long hours before the right ten would arrive, and what could she do? Read—she would try, and she went to the drawing-room, and found some books from Mudie's; she took up the first that came and opened it at random; she sat down in a chair at the window, and determined to fix her attention. She read the first page of the beginning of a chapter, but did not know a word about it when she got to the end, and

she read it through again with the same result.

She threw the book down, it was no use trying to read, she could only think of the coming evening.

The back drawing-room, which was much larger than the front, had been prepared for the dancing. It was quite empty, excepting the narrow rout seats, as they call them, lining the room all round, and the piano, which was in a corner of the room. The room was nearly dark; all the windows, though left open, were darkened by the curtains being closed. So the only light came from the front room.

Hilda thought she would try the piano. She went in and opened it, and began playing a very pretty waltz, but she was tired of it before she had finished it, so she jumped up, and humming the same tune, began dancing on the well-waxed floor. The activity of the body seemed best to agree with

her impatience, and she went on till she heard some one say,

"Well done, Hilda, nothing like exercise!"

She stopped, half ashamed at being caught.

"Why, David, what can have brought you at this hour?" Hilda said. Not a very warm welcome; but he had scarcely ever had that, and now never.

"To see if I could be of any use."

"Why, what use can you possibly be?"

Hilda did not mean to be rude, much less to hurt his feelings, but David did feel a little vexed at her speaking so. He was the most unexacting lover that ever breathed, but he did not, on principle, like to be spoken to as if he was her inferior, when he thought himself so very much her superior.

"If not to you—which I never dreamt of being," he replied, "I may be to your aunt;

and it would be as well if you learnt to speak a little more politely for the future."

He walked towards the door as he said this. Hilda was rather softened by the first part of his speech, and had he stopped there, she might have made it right; but the end of it made her feel very angry, and so, like a spoilt child, determined to have the last word, she said,

"For the future, I, probably, shall never speak to you at all."

She stood looking out of the window for some minutes after he was gone.

"I hope he has left the house; how I hate him now! I wish I could tell auntie so, but I suppose I had better not. What a difference between his great, heavy, thick face, and Walter Wentworth's. I wonder if he does not think sometimes that I am sure not to marry him? He can't think I can like him when I see the difference between them; and, of course, he must see and know

that Walter Wentworth cares for me; but it is not worth while, he thinks, to speak about it, because we are not engaged. Of course, I am free—I can marry who I like, but I still wish auntie knew it. I wonder what she is doing? I will go and see, perhaps she does want help, though I can't think in what; but if she does, I can help her, and much better, too, I am sure, than that stupid, disagreeable David! I wonder when he goes back to Scotland? I wish he was gone!"

Such were Hilda's thoughts after her cousin had left the room.

She went down to the breakfast-room, but as she opened the door before she went in, she heard David talking. She could not bear at that moment to see him again, she knew she should say something rude to him if she did, and so she crossed the hall, and went into the long dining-room.

It was a beautiful room, well decorated with good pictures; for it was a furnished

house, and so Sir William had nothing to do with the choice of them; but had you asked him what he thought of them, he would have told you they were not to be compared to some he had at Burwood.

Hilda hoped to find her aunt there, but she only saw innumerable people in shirt-sleeves and white aprons, carrying things about in the most incomprehensible way possible, putting on empty dishes, and then darting in and out of the room. It looked like a senseless pantomime to Hilda, so she retreated, and walked slowly up-stairs to her aunt's room. She found her there.

"I have been wandering all over the house for you, auntie."

"Well, dear, a very foolish thing to do; why did you not come here first?"

"I don't know. I wish to-night were come! David's here; he came to help, he says, but you don't want him—do you?"

"Why, Hilda, what's the matter with you?"

and Lady Fordyce turned from some lace she was looking at, to look at Hilda, "you seem out of sorts."

"Well, so I am, David is disagreeable."

"My dear child, don't let trifles vex you, David is, I am sure, very fond of you, and would say or do nothing that could distress you. I did not know you were so much of lovers as to quarrel."

"Oh, dearest aunt, never say—"

A knock at the door, and the maid coming in without waiting for the "come in" the knock seemed to ask for, stopped Hilda, or, in another moment, she would have told her aunt all; her dislike of her cousin, her determination never to become his wife, and probably her attachment to another; but it was not to be so—so when the maid had delivered a small parcel to her mistress, and had again left the room, Hilda, had Lady Fordyce given her the opportunity, would not have gone on, for

the cold severe face of Walter Wentworth had risen before her like a warning. But her aunt thought no more about it, but opening the little blue paper packet, and then taking off another paper, which was white, there were two maroon coloured morocco cases inside. She opened one, it was a bracelet of dead gold engraved, the shape of a strap with a buckle, studded with emeralds and diamonds, she laid it open before Hilda, and then took up the other. It, too, looked like a strap made of gold, with alternate nobs of gold and pale coral along it, but no buckle—they were very handsome.

"How beautiful!" said Hilda.

"Do you think so, dear? I am so glad, for they are for you, one from your uncle, the other from me."

Hilda threw her arms round her aunt's neck, and said,

"How good you are to me, dearest aunt,

I never know how to thank people properly, but you know I feel it all. Give me a kiss, that is better than the bracelets."

This did not sound very grateful, but Lady Fordyce understood her niece well enough to feel at the moment she meant it that rather than be refused a kiss she would give up the bracelets.

"Who chose them?" asked Hilda.

"I chose the buckle one, which is my gift, and your uncle chose the other. I shan't ask you which you like best, so don't tell me."

"I shall answer like the children, I like both," said Hilda, laughing.

"Take them to your own room, dear, I am glad you are pleased, and go and thank your uncle."

Hilda went with her treasures, put them on her dressing-table, and ran down the stairs to the breakfast-room, she did not wait to hear if any one was there, but went in. Her uncle was alone, with his

back to the door, reading the paper. She went up to him, and putting both her hands on his shoulders leant her head forward.

"You dear extravagant old uncle," she said, "I must give you the best kiss I have for that lovely bracelet, I shall feel quite proud to-night to be decked out in my own property, for you know I have been wearing borrowed goods."

"I think they are pretty," said Sir William. He hated being thanked; but he had something to say to Hilda, and so he took one of her hands off his shoulder and said, "You vexed David to-day, Hilda, try and make it smooth to-night; there, don't say anything, I dislike talking about it, but he appeared very much put out, and it will do no good quarrelling before you are married, for you will find it will only make you miserable after. There, now run away, I want to finish the paper before I am turned out of this room, for I suppose they will come

here soon. I shall go and sit in the garden if they do, for I won't be disturbed again, and then, Hilda, you can come and fetch me, or bring my dinner to me," he added laughing.

He was so glad at having said his disagreeable say, that he was quite inclined to joke —a rare thing for him. Hilda saw her uncle did not wish her to make an answer about David, so she would not vex him by doing so. She only said,

"I don't think you will be disturbed here, except for luncheon being laid."

"But as I never eat luncheon, why it will not be such a pleasant diversion as it may be to you."

"Oh, anything will be a diversion to me that will pass the day, I don't think I ever knew time so slow as it is just now. Goodbye, I must go and look at my bracelet again."

Hilda went back to her aunt's room.

"Your dress has just come home, dear, go and look at it, it is very pretty."

"I hope it is all white, every bit of it." She recollected Walter liked pure white.

"Go and see," was all the reply she got.

"What a lovely dress, Miss," said Strange, as Hilda went into the room, "don't you think so?"

There was a slight shade of disappointment in Hilda's face, for though it was quite to her taste, she was sure it would not be to his. The skirt was covered over with lilac flower, alternate white and lilac, and to each little branch were a few green leaves, and the body was made to match, there was the wreath for the head, and it altogether looked a very aërial floating sort of a thing, and very pretty to the eye; but there was colour, much to Hilda's annoyance.

"Don't you think, Strange, all the lilac

lilac might be taken out and white lilac put in its place, I like all white best."

"Dear me, Miss! it would spoil the whole dress. Why, the lilac is the prettiest part about it; besides, it would tear all the tulle to pieces to put in and take out in that manner."

Hilda was getting more put out every moment she looked at the dress, it was so pretty, and yet she did not dare to admit it to herself.

"I told her all white. I can't think why people can't attend to orders."

"Well, but, Miss, it is all white; it is only the flower every here and there that is not."

"I think some one is knocking at the door, Strange, go and see who it is," said Hilda.

Strange went to the door, opened it about a foot, a little whispering ensued, and she closed the door, and came back with a lump of white in her hand.

"If you please, Miss, this has been left for you by one of Mr. Harding's people."

"Who on earth is Mr. Harding?" said Hilda, taking the white lump in her hand. She saw several pins stuck into the part she laid hold of, and sitting down on the edge of her bed, she took them out one by one, and dropped them into Strange's hand, which was held open to receive them.

The first covering was unpinned, then there was a layer of wadding, and on lifting up the wadding, Hilda saw a most exquisite bouquet, formed entirely of violets—white and lilac violets. She looked at it a moment, and then she looked at Strange, as if she expected her to explain all about it.

"Why, one would really think, Miss, that Mr. Harding had had a piece of the flower off your dress to match the violets by, they are exactly the same colour."

"But who on earth is Mr. Harding? I

never heard of him, that I know of, in my life !"

Though she asked a question, she did not at all appear as if she expected an answer, for she went towards the door before Strange could have answered, had she had the slightest intention of doing so.

"Look here, aunt," she said, going into Lady Fordyce's room again, "is not this beautiful? And Mr. Harding has sent it. Do you know Mr. Harding?" and she took her eyes off the flowers to look at her aunt.

Her aunt laughed, really laughed, as if she felt excessively amused, but seeing a demure expression gradually stealing over Hilda's face, she said,

"Mr. Harding, my dear child, is the maker of the bouquet, certainly not the giver. He is the most celebrated bouquet-maker in London."

"Really; but then, who could have sent it to me?"

"Perhaps David, dear, as a peace-offering."

The idea was a very unlucky one, for it instantly took away all Hilda's interest. Of course it was David, she thought, and as he had known what her dress was to be, as she had told him, and he had sent her the thing. Its beauty had all vanished in her eyes; she felt inclined to throw it away.

Perhaps it was a pity she did not.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHY, I do declare here is mamma in her own proper person," said Hilda, as her mother and Arthur came up the wide, shallow stairs. "How good of you to come! But I suppose you only said you wouldn't, in order to make us feel the honour greater when you did."

"No, dear child," said Mrs. Chichester, "I did not know I should be here myself till about two hours ago."

There was another knock at the door.

"Who can come so early?" said Lady Fordyce.

"Most likely the Grahams, or Matilda and her husband," said Arthur.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Lady Fordyce.

It proved to be the Grahams. Sir William, in the morning, by way of making matters a little smoother, had asked David to be sure to bring his father and mother as early as possible.

When Hilda saw David, she looked at her bouquet, and then looked at him, but he looked so thickly unconscious of it, that she was thankful that, at all events, she would be spared thanking him for it. Her aunt had made her carry it, for she had, in her own mind, determined to leave it to die a natural death in her bed-room.

She thought him looking more heavy, more uninteresting than ever; but she knew she had a disagreeable task to perform, and so the sooner it was got over, the better. He was standing beside her, and, therefore, she did not let the opportunity pass.

"I am afraid I was not in the best temper this morning, David, and, as people generally are under those circumstances, did not make myself very agreeable," she said, smiling, "but I really did not mean to offend you."

"I don't suppose you did," he answered, "but I hope you are not subject often to have such fits."

"I am not sure," she replied, in a careless tone, "I rather think I am, so you must beware of me."

"Oh, I shall soon cure them," he muttered, in an under tone, so that she did not hear him; and she moved towards her mother.

"Look, mamma, at these bracelets, gifts from my uncle and aunt to-day."

"They are, indeed, beautiful. You are a spoilt child, Hilda," said her mother, looking at her affectionately. "There are the Phillips's coming up," she added.

"Good gracious! how very plain Matilda is looking, too! What can possess her to wear a yellow dress? Why you don't see where it begins, it is so much the colour of her skin," said Hilda.

"Why, really, I think it *is* her skin you see so much of; her dress begins so low, it is little more than a trimming to herself."

"And that awful man, mamma! I often wonder she can live with that face everlastingly before her."

"I think she has considerably the best bargain," said Arthur, who had joined them.

People were beginning now to arrive, the intimates and the old people, wall-flowers, who were anxious to secure some place where they could see, and yet be seen, for they thought themselves still worthy of admiration.

"Don't you think David should dance the first dance with Hilda," said old Mrs. Graham to Lady Fordyce.

"Why, if they like it themselves, certainly."

"But David will never think he ought to ask unless I tell him."

Lady Fordyce smiled, it flashed across her mind that probably by the time he had been instructed in what he ought to do, Hilda would have promised some one else.

"My dear," said the old lady going up to her son, "I think, considering your position, it would be but right for you to ask Hilda for the first dance."

"If I must, why I suppose I must," growled out David, "but it's a great bore, I didn't want to dance, I hate dancing, and don't understand it."

He sauntered across the room to where Hilda was standing, talking to a gentlemanly looking man of about thirty. The music making a most uncomfortable noise, scraping, and squeezing, and seemingly trying to be as much out of tune as possible.

"Will you dance this with me? of course it will be a quadrille, for I couldn't dance anything else," said David, in not the most anxious or lover-like manner.

Hilda either did not or pretended not to hear, but turned a questioning face round, so that he had to repeat his request. She could not help herself, she was not engaged, so she accepted him. She could not either desire the musicians to change the dance, for it was printed on all the cards: No. 1, Quadrille.

Well, after all, it was better than a waltz, she could not have borne that David should put his arm round her. She had not long become accustomed to waltzing, at first it seemed incomprehensible how people could do so, and she would not do it herself till she tried with Arthur. There is nothing like custom or habit, it soon becomes our second nature, and after Hilda had waltzed two or three times with her brother, she

tried with some one else only because her brother happened not to be there, *ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute*, and Hilda soon got over her objections; however, as far as David was concerned, she adhered to them, and was very thankful he had never asked her. Now the reason was explained, he couldn't.

"Your friend is not much of a dancing man, apparently," remarked Hilda's companion, after David had walked back again to the other end of the room.

"No, he is a Scotchman, and I don't believe he can do anything reasonable, or like other people; he is my cousin, and I don't remember, when I was quite a child, ever seeing him take pleasure in sociable amusements."

"Well, but then you are Scotch too."

"Oh, no! I am Irish, that is, I have so little Scotch blood in me that I never consider myself so; you know one may

have Scotch cousins, and yet not be Scotch."

The band struck up the preliminary bit, to give notice for all dancers to prepare. Hilda was not sorry, for she was getting tired of the man she was talking to. He was a Mr. Mordaunt Dunnett, one of those people rooms are generally two thirds full of, seen everywhere, apparently known by everyone and knowing everyone, but intimate with none, for his greatest friends could not tell you where he lived—he only gave his club address—or what he lived on; he looked like a gentleman, and behaved like one, and that was sufficient, and was always willing to dance the whole night, and take as many people down to supper as he could.

The rooms were looking tolerably full, but Hilda had not yet seen Walter Wentworth; she wondered he had not come, he had told her he was to dine out, but that he should get away as soon as possible. She

saw his friend Mr. Munro, but she was so far off she could not get to him, and moreover he was rather deaf, and it made it always conspicuous talking to him.

David was coming, she would make him go to the end of the room, so as to be near the door. After all, good sometimes comes out of evil, had she not been dancing with him, she could not have said where she wished to stand. She took his arm, which he offered as if he thought he were doing something beneath a man, or at least, a Scotchman to do. He was by no means in an amiable mood to-night; when she proposed moving nearer the door, he could not understand why she was not contented to remain where she was. She said the music was so loud that she could not hear if she remained so near it, and another advantage of being near the door, it was cooler. So David, being obliged, dragged his thick, heavy legs one after the other

as if they were lead instead of flesh and bone.

Hilda did not say so, but she thought he had caught her temper fever of the morning; she knew it was an uncomfortable malady to contend with, so she did not aggravate him as she might have done. She was very glad when they were at a stand still, for then she was able to leave hold of his arm; she had a great objection to touching him, she even disliked shaking hands with him, lately she had avoided it as much as possible. Their voices certainly did not add to the buzz that was in the room, for except a captious "they are waiting for you," or "do attend to the dance," there was not a word passed between them. Hilda's ears and eyes were all at the staircase, which she just caught a glimpse of where she stood; but she listened and looked in vain, the dance was over, but he had not arrived.

Lady Fordyce was standing at the door

that was close to the stairs, not the one that led into the dancing-room, but a door that belonged to the anti-chamber, as it was called.

"I will go to my aunt," said Hilda to David.

He did not seem greatly distressed at dropping her by her aunt, and she certainly was most delighted to be dropped. Mrs. Phillips was standing by her aunt, and so Hilda looked about for her mother. She always avoided being near Matilda when she could, but she could not see Mrs. Chichester.

"Who are you looking for, Hilda?" said Mrs. Phillips. "If I guess rightly, you will see what, or rather who, you most desire to see by looking down the stairs."

"I am looking for mamma," said Hilda, but her eyes did turn to the stairs. She saw, in truth, what she did most wish to see; she saw Walter coming up. But had she been

blind, the "Mr. Wentworth—Mr. Wentworth," being shouted from one servant to the other, till it reached John himself, who was standing within a yard of Lady Fordyce, and who whispered the name in a clear, distinct tone, would have told her of his approach.

She knew Mr. Wentworth was looking at her, and she knew, for she felt it, that she was changing colour—not to red, but to white. She would have given worlds, at that moment, to have stopped her heart beating, and to have got rid of that lump in her throat, which, suddenly, she felt choking her.

"How pale you are, dear," said Matilda, in a would-be sisterly tone, "are you ill? Will you like to go to the window?"

It recalled Hilda to herself, but her savage self.

"How can you be so stupid, Matilda? I do wish you would leave me alone!" was the reply Hilda gave.

Matilda was a clever woman, but a spiteful and vicious one, as most intensely ugly women are. She knew quite well, as well as if Hilda's heart had been laid bare to her, that she loved Wentworth; and she had a sort of delightful satisfaction in thinking she was bound to that selfish, disagreeable Scotchman, and would never be the wife of the man whom she would most wish to be.

Matilda disliked Wentworth, he had never unbent to her; there had been nothing to gain by it, so he was proud, haughty, and cold in his manner, whenever he addressed her.

Mr. Wentworth shook hands with Lady Fordyce, and there stopped, he only vouchsafed a formal bow to Matilda and Hilda; but Hilda seemed to understand it.

Sir Hugh McDough now came up, and asked her to dance. He was a fast young Irishman, but he was amusing, and she rather liked him. She knew, too, that until

she was quite free from her own people, Walter would remain like an iceberg to her. So the sooner she got away, and gave him an opportunity of following her, the better.

She therefore accepted Sir Hugh, and taking his arm, went back to the dancing-room. She answered *de tort et de travers* all his foolish, wild speeches, which, however, only served to amuse him extremely. She was so glad when the dance was over. They walked round the room.

"Are you engaged for the next dance, Miss Chichester, and may I hope to have the honour?" said a voice she well knew, from behind the boudoir room, as she was passing it.

She had taken good care not to be engaged for any, but one by one, therefore she was always free for the next, in case he should happen to come; so she accepted.

"I will take this seat," she said to Sir

Hugh McDough, seeing one vacant, not very far from the boudoir; so she sat down.

Sir Hugh bowed and left her, thinking she meant it as a hint to get rid of him. Considering he was an Irishman, he was not far astray in his conjecture. Nor was Walter, who saw and understood it, even better than the young baronet.

Hilda was no sooner seated, and disembarrassed of her partner, than she began to wish she had kept him a little longer, for Walter did not seize the opportunity of joining her in the speedy manner she expected. She resolved she would look in quite a contrary direction to where he stood; and she did, as long as she was conscious of where her eyes were, and it was not till she saw, or rather felt some one was sitting down beside her, that she was aware she was gazing intently into the boudoir. She had been in a dreamy state for a minute or two, but she was thoroughly awakened by Walter's voice.

"You belong to me," there was a second's pause, during which Hilda felt great difficulty in swallowing, "for this quadrille; for I think it is a quadrille," he added, in a strangely different tone to the way he began.

Hilda made no reply, she could not. He had a strange influence over her; she seemed a changed being the moment he was near her. All her natural girlish manner went, and a nervous, frightened feeling seemed to creep over her.

He knew it himself, he saw she was different to him to what she was to any one else; but he was glad it was so, and he would not have had it otherwise. She began looking at her bouquet, and parting the lilac violets from the white ones.

"Did your milliner make your bouquet as well as your dress?" asked Walter.

"No; but one might almost think so, they match so well." said Hilda. "The

bouquet was sent to me to-day—is it not pretty?"

"Yes," he replied, in a tone as if he did not much care to admire it, "but your dress is lovely, and you look beautiful!"

Hilda looked up suddenly, her eyes seemed to ask whether he was in earnest, or whether it was only his sarcastic manner.

"You seem to doubt me."

"No," she replied, feeling annoyed, "I dislike flattery above all things, and I did not expect it from you."

"I did not flatter you, Miss Chichester, I spoke what I thought—the truth. But, perhaps, you dislike the truth, too," his voice sounded hard.

"Oh, don't say that," she replied, "I love the truth. But you are vexed at what I said." Her eyes asked forgiveness.

He rose, offered her his arm, which she felt tenderly pressed to his side; for the moment, he felt proud of the love which that

beautiful young girl had for him, and of the influence he had over her.

"I never will speak but the honest truth to you; promise me the same," he said, looking at her.

"I promise," she murmured.

They took their places at the side of the room; the quadrille was beginning, but they had time to talk before they were required to join in it.

"Who sent you those flowers?" asked Walter.

"I don't know," replied Hilda, "some one with good taste. Don't you think so?" she added, looking from the flowers up to him.

He was watching her face with a curious expression.

"What are you looking at so?" she said, colouring.

"I was wondering whether, in the very first words you just now spoke, you had not broken your promise already."

Her eyes flashed indignantly. *He* suspect her of telling a falsehood—she who would scorn to deviate one hair's breadth from the one clear line of truth !

But they had to dance, so she could not reply. When they were still again, he did not give her time.

"Will you forgive me? I did misjudge you, but for a second only, believe me; I no sooner saw your truthful eyes, than I felt indignant with myself for the suspicion."

She was industriously pulling off little pieces of the lace-edged paper round her bouquet.

"Hilda, speak to me."

He saw he had conquered; her bosom heaved, and a strange expression, almost of pain, for a second passed over her face. He was waiting for her to answer; she knew it, and she did not dare disobey. As she turned her face to him, he saw she was very pale, and her eyes looked larger and brighter than ever, but the soft look had gone.

"Never doubt me," the words came thickly and indistinctly.

"Never, as long as I live." He spoke so earnestly, so gently, so repentantly, that had she not already forgiven him, she could not have resisted doing so now.

But he also learnt a lesson—that Hilda's purity and innocence would be a shield of immense safety to her, for with it she would judge him and his actions; he must be careful not to try her till he had gained a stronger power over her than he yet had.

The quadrille was over, she walked round the room with him, leaning on his arm.

As she passed by her mother, who was sitting on a low ottoman in a corner, she asked her to sit by her a little, and tell her who some of the people were.

As she withdrew her arm, Walter said, almost in a whisper, "You must waltz with me." She made no answer, but he knew "you must" had more power over her than "will you."

It was strange why Hilda should have liked his asserting an authority over her, he had no right to, but she did; she loved him more in his stern moods, than when he softened in his manner towards her. There was a charm she could not define, and did not seek to, in his strong, firm will, that made her feel she could not contend with it.

"What a proud, disagreeable man Mr. Wentworth seems, Hilda, I wonder you can bear talking to him." Mrs. Chichester thought him proud, but she thought him quite the reverse of disagreeable, but she fancied it would do good to speak against him to her daughter.

"Do you think so, mamma?" she replied, very calmly. She felt half glad people called him disagreeable, and quite glad at his being called proud. She never should have loved him had he not been proud, very proud, too; she could not respect a man who was not proud, at least, who had not the pride Walter

had; and as to his being disagreeable, it was only those who did not know him thoroughly thought him that.

"Who is that tall, thin young man coming up to you?"

Hilda looked up to see and tell her mother, but she had not time before he came up, and held out his hand. Hilda thought it very free and easy of him, considering she had never spoken to him in her life, though she had been so near rendering it likely that he would never have the opportunity of speaking to her, or any one else, again; for it was Lord Borton. However, in her own house, she could scarcely refuse to shake hands with him.

"Will you give me the pleasure of this waltz?" he said.

She was not engaged, so she accepted; but she was not quite comfortable about it, for she did not know what waltz Wentworth wished her to dance with him; but he had

not said the next, so she supposed and hoped he did not mean it.

They had been dancing some time, and were now resting against a console table. Hilda was out of breath, so for a minute or two they were silent.

"I feel deeply flattered at seeing that bouquet in your hand, as it leads me to hope it was the one most to your taste of all that may have been sent to you," said his Lordship.

"Did you send it?" said Hilda. "How very odd!"

Lord Borton said nothing, but looked dreadfully put out at the unconcerned manner Hilda treated him in. She noticed it, and ever being tenacious of hurting any one's feelings, she said,

"I certainly did not deserve such a beautiful bouquet after this morning's affair."

"I shall look on this morning," he replied,

trying to look sentimental, as the happiest in my life."

Hilda thought it would be better not to go on with the subject, so she proposed they should continue the dance, but as they started, the music stopped. She said she was tired, and went back to the seat she had had by her mother; but Mrs. Phillips was occupying it, so she stood by them.

"Who gave you your bouquet, Hilda?" asked Matilda.

"Lord Borton sent it," she replied.

"Mamma told me of this morning's ad—"

"Mrs. Phillips, if you are not engaged for this dance, may I have the honour?" said Mr. Wentworth, before Matilda could finish the sentence.

She accepted, and they disappeared in the crowd.

Hilda took her seat. She wondered where Walter had come from, she had not seen

him since she danced with him. She wondered why he asked Matilda to dance; she wondered what he looked so stern about; she wondered what he would say to Matilda.

"You have no possible right to be sitting, Miss Chichester, take pity on me, I have not danced once to-night."

It was Mr. Munro, Walter's deaf friend. She was not sorry to be interrupted in her wonderings, so she danced with him, but he had taken her to the opposite end of the room to where Matilda and Walter were standing.

"You are beginning to look tired, Miss Chichester, it is scarcely fair to ask you to dance; will you prefer sitting down, and we will talk instead?"

"No, we will dance and talk too, and it is you to begin, Mr. Munro. I think you want to get off on your own account," said Hilda, laughing.

"No, you are very cruel to say so, but

I was thinking about you for to-morrow night."

"What of to-morrow night?"

"Why, 'the Huguenots' is the opera fixed on, and Wentworth told me this morning, as an excuse for not going with me to the other side of Regent's Park, that he must go to Mitchell's and secure a box for Lady Fordyce, as he had promised to do so the first time it was played."

A flush of pleasure passed over Hilda; then he did think of her, every now and then, during the last few days, occasional doubts had arisen whether he loved her as she loved him, but she thought, as he remembered such a trifling thing as the opera box, he must love her very much. Poor Hilda, why can't those marvellous eyes of yours see into that dark page in your life, that at the next time you shall have to turn a leaf, you will find so dark, so black, you can trace no light, no shade even anywhere.

Well! it is better so, be happy while you can, bask in the sun of your love till it scorches you, and then, though you feel it is destruction, go on, nearer and nearer till you are so burnt, so destroyed, it were better for you that you should never have been born.

"I did not know Lord Borton was an intimate friend of Sir William Fordyce's," said Walter Wentworth to his partner.

Now Matilda, like all mischievous people, was no fool, she saw through Walter at once; she knew he had seen something he did not like between Lord Borton and Hilda, perhaps he had heard about the bouquet—she did not know what, nor did she care, but she knew there was something. He, too, saw but too late he had made a mistake, and that Matilda had discovered in some degree the cause of his remark, though he did say it in a very nonchalant way.

"Lord Borton," said Matilda, slowly,

"well, I should have termed it more a romantic acquaintance than an intimate friendship," and she smiled with her lips tightly closed together; and it was well she did, for her teeth looked like bits of amber.

Mr. Wentworth determined to say no more about Lord Borton, he should, when he considered the proper time came, make Hilda give her own account. He had seen them the whole time they had been dancing together, though he remained himself out of sight; he had heard from Hilda's own lips that Lord Borton had given her the bouquet, and he felt, what must we term it, not jealous, for he knew he had no occasion, but selfish about it. He did not care what had brought the acquaintance about, it was a liberty in Lord Borton to send her a bouquet, and she, too, still continued to carry it, though another man than himself had given it to her.

He was glad when his dance was over with Mrs. Phillips, he had intended to make use of her, to learn what it was, and how it was, that had occasioned Lord Borton to shake hands with Miss Chichester to-night, when last night they were not even on a bowing acquaintance, but he found himself check-mated in the first move, and Walter was so unaccustomed to this sort of thing, that he winced beneath the victory gained over him.

He did not offer to take her down stairs, though there was that general move that invariably announces the supper-room being opened; but he dropped her at the first empty chair, and bowed himself off. She was quite aware of the state of affairs; she felt, too, now she had made almost as foolish a speech as he had himself, and that half her power of annoying him had gone, for she certainly did wish to annoy him. It was quite enough that in appearances he

seemed to prefer Hilda to herself to render her his bitter enemy. She hated Hilda, and she hated any one who showed a liking for her; the reason why she got on so well with David was because she knew there was no love there, and that he probably would be the accommodating tool to cause Hilda's future never-ending sorrow.

Supper was over, or rather the first act of it, for it continued, when once it began, till everyone had left. And, though seven waltzes had been danced, still Hilda had seen nothing of Walter, but in the distance. She was beginning to feel weary and worn out; she feared once or twice he was gone, but something within her told her he would not have done that without at least saying good night, so she was comforted.

She had gone into the boudoir, a small room, that might with truth have been termed a *bijou* of a room. It was quite empty. In a sort of recess, that was filled

up by a long canopy, covered with yellow satin, Hilda threw herself down, she was tired in mind and body. She threw her bouquet, that she no longer admired or cared for, and that she had a sort of presentiment had something to do with the uneasiness she was now suffering under, on to a small table that stood against a pier glass. She laid her fan by her side, and then she pulled off first one and then the other of her white kid gloves. She rubbed her hands together as if they were cold, but they were not; she then laid her head back against the satin fluted drapery that was against the wall, for there was no paper in the room, and closed her eyes, her feet were stretched out—she looked almost like a marble statue reclining, she was so colourless; but her features looked too soft and undulating not to have some life in them; her red lips were slightly parted, which took away from the chiselled

look marble generally has. She had remained so undisturbed, though not undisturbing, for some time.

When she opened her eyes, which she did slowly and languidly, Walter Wentworth was standing, with his arms folded, before her. She started up in a moment, and before she was aware what she was saying—the words, "I was so afraid you were gone," were spoken.

He continued gazing at her, but did not speak.

"Is every one gone? I think I must have been to sleep," she said.

He gently replaced her on the canopy, and then sat down himself by her side. She submitted, as a young child would do to a severe nurse.

"Some few are gone, but many remain. But I have been seeking you for some time."

He had had plenty of time, whilst he had

been standing by Hilda, to notice where her flowers were gone to, but it was necessary for him that he might hear all he wished Hilda to tell him, to ask for them.

"Where is your bouquet, Miss Chichester?" it was asked in a most indifferent tone.

"My bouquet? Oh, I think I laid it down there somewhere," and she looked in the direction where she knew it was not.

"I see it; I will get it for you."

Walter got up, and took the flowers, and gave them to her.

"I don't want it." She said it like a spoiled child.

"Have you discovered yet, who, amongst your numerous admirers, was the donor?" He asked the question with a sneer, that made Hilda look up, and gave her courage.

"You heard me say who gave it me; it was Lord Borton, and you know he is no admirer, for I never spoke to him till to-night;

and, moreover, as it appears you only came in to annoy me, I shall go."

She half rose, but he was up in a moment, and she sat down again.

"I am very unfortunate this evening, I have done nothing but offend you. It will be better for me to go," and he moved towards the door. He looked so really like going, that Hilda said hurriedly,

"No, you have not offended me, but you knew quite well Lord Borton gave it me."

He turned round with a smile she did not quite like, it seemed as if he had been quite sure she would stop his leaving.

"May I sit down again, and may I ask you a question, and will you promise not to be offended?"

He looked grave now, and spoke earnestly. He had taken the first request for granted, for he was sitting down, and with one arm resting on a little table by him, and his fore-

head leaning on his hand so as to shade his eyes, he was gazing at her.

"Yes; what do you wish to know? I will try not to be offended;" and she looked up smiling.

"Why, if you never spoke to Lord Borton but for the first time to-night, did you shake hands with him?" he asked it so sternly that she felt afraid; she felt as if she must have done something very wrong in shaking hands with that boy nobleman, "or permit him to shake hands with you?"

She waited a moment to consider why she had done so, that she might give the true reason, but she found none; at length she said, with her eyes intently fixed on one of the bits of lilac flower on her dress, and which she was arranging in the best order with her small, pretty hand.

"I don't know; he offered his hand to me, and I thought it would be rude to refuse it."

"Then you did think about it?"

"Yes, because you were standing near, and last night you saw us at the Thornton's, and you knew I then was not acquainted with him, so I wondered whether you would not think it strange to see me shaking hands with him this evening."

She raised her eyes as she said this, and saw the same smile on Walter's face as she saw when he was leaving the boudoir and she stopped him.

"But what brought about this sudden acquaintance?"

She then related to him the adventure of the morning.

"So, out of gratitude for not quite causing his death, he is willing to offer you his life," said Wentworth, in a musing tone.

He was not quite so certain that this juvenile nobleman might not prove a disagreeable rival. He knew the general attraction a handle to a name has to a young lady, and

Hilda, though different to most girls, was but a woman, after all. Might not the prospect of a coronet, weigh down his love, or more properly speaking, her love for him, for there was nothing else to put in the scale.

He could not marry, it was folly and madness for the idea to cross him, he must not allow it to cross him again; but he could not give up this young girl, with her fond, disinterested love, to such a mere boy as Lord Borton, or, indeed, to any boy, or man either, if he could help it. She had admitted that she merely thought about the propriety of shaking hands with him, because *he* was near. She, probably, had said it with the most perfect innocence, but then it proved only the more strongly how true her feelings were for him.

"When once you knew he had given you those flowers, why did you continue to carry them?" he asked.

"I saw no reason for not doing so, after knowing it, than I did for doing so before. I wished to leave them up-stairs, but my aunt, who thought my cousin had sent them, and might be hurt if he saw I did not wear them, made me do so," she replied, rather haughtily. She seemed to think he had no right to speak to her in that manner, and yet she had not the courage to tell him so; but he saw instantly what she felt.

"You think me very impertinent, asking you all these questions." He paused a minute, and then said, "Will you promise me to leave it here, on the table, and not use it again?" he bent his head towards her, his eyes seemed to pierce through to her very soul. She raised hers slowly, and met his gaze with one of those genuine, true looks, that had more power over him than any other, because so rarely met with.

"If you wish it, I will not even look at it again."

Her words corresponded with her eyes. He took her hand, and held it for a moment in his.

"You will do what I wish, you say; remember those words. Will you always do so?" She withdrew her hand; her heart was beating so loud, she thought he must hear its throbs. "Will you?" he asked again.

"Yes, if I am able," it was almost inaudible, but he heard it.

"If Lord Borton asks you to dance again to-night, you will refuse?"

"Yes."

"And the next waltz is mine?"

"If you like."

"If *I* like? No, if *you* like."

She looked up smiling. He took the smile for his answer.

She moved to see where her gloves were, and as she took them, and began putting them on, Walter took them out of her hand, and held her hand as he did so.

"Not yet," he said, "it is mine—at all events, for the next dance."

He suddenly dropped her hand, and jumped up, and taking a little book from the table, said, in his coolest and most distant tone,

"Have you read the words of the opera of 'Les Huguenots?'"

Hilda looked up as a child will, on the sight of anything very novel or astounding, but before she could express more than what she did by a look, Arthur came in; he was looking very much put out.

"Every one has been looking for you, and enquiring for you for this last half hour. Why on earth do you come and sit here?"

"I came because I wanted to get out of the everybody's way, who seems to have been hunting for me," replied Hilda, rather irritated.

Walter had gone into the dancing-room as soon as Arthur began speaking to his sister.

"Then it is a pity you did not come alone."

"I did come alone," said Hilda.

"But you don't seem to have remained alone."

"Perhaps not; but I don't know what that can matter to any one, or what it is that has apparently ruffled your temper."

"Dear Hilda, believe me, if I speak crossly, it is from my love for you. I have been longing to speak to you for some time, and, but that I feared you might take what I say otherwise than as I mean it, I should have done so ages ago. You know you are young, and I don't think I am telling you anything you don't know, when I tell you you are beautiful; both possessions that will of themselves give you loads of enemies. I scarcely know how to word what I wish to tell you, for I feel of late that I have not been happy in my choice of expressions."

He paused, and looked at his sister. She

was pulling out her gloves as far as they would stretch, and flattening them down on her knee, her lips were pouting, and she looked decidedly cross. Arthur feared he had chosen an unfortunate moment, but he had began, it was better to go on, and have it over. He thought it his duty. He had many peculiar ideas as to duty. He thought it his duty to see that Hilda did not flirt with any one. She was engaged to David, so she had not only no right, but it was indecorous and unmaidenly, he thought. He seemed quite to forget that David was on the spot to look after his own honour, that Sir William Fordyce was there to see after his sister's. Whether it ever occurred or not seems doubtful.

His affection for his sister had arisen more from pride than the relationship between them, and he thought he should suffer if her name were lightly spoken of, as it assuredly would be, if she, affianced to one man, were

spoken of openly at a club as being in love with another.

"Do you know, Hilda, it was not right for you to be sitting in here alone with Mr. Wentworth? When young ladies are seen to allow any man to act in so marked a manner towards them, their names are invariably coupled together."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean, that if you allow Mr. Wentworth to sit on a sofa beside you, in a small room apart from the other rooms which are nearly filled with people, and where they might think it intruding to come, that you lay yourself open to remarks being passed, which no young girl would be flattered by hearing."

"I don't care what people say! If they choose to talk of things they know nothing about, they may do so; I merely came in here because I felt a little tired, and Mr. Wentworth joined me here by chance, for he

did not know where I was; and if that is sufficient to make people say ill-natured things, why they may say them."

"But you forget, Hilda, your position; remember, you are the promised wife of another man, and—"

"I—"

Lord Borton appeared at the door.

"You promised me a waltz, Miss Chichester, may it be this one? They are playing such a charming one!"

Hilda was in a very bad temper, and looked very indignant at the moment Lord Borton appeared. She replied, very coldly,

"I am engaged."

He bowed and left, not quite certain whether she meant engaged to dance, or engaged to talk; however, he thought, perhaps, he had not lost a great deal, for Hilda certainly was not looking lovely at that moment.

"Who are you engaged to?" asked her brother.

"Mr. Wentworth," she replied.

He thought so, he asked her not to dance with him, but she refused; she said she had promised, and she never broke a promise. She was wondering, though, whether he would come, and why he had not come already.

"You never break a promise, Hilda; I am heartily glad to hear you say so. Remember you have promised to marry David Graham."

She was interrupted before when she was going to deny being his promised wife, and the recollection of her waltz with Walter that Lord Borton's request had reminded her of, had driven it for the moment out of her mind, and this time, too, she was stopped before she could get out more than,

"I tell you—"

She was now thoroughly roused, her face was flushed, her eyes flashed with indignation. She had never promised to be his wife, she

never would and never intended, she was to have said all this, but she only said: "I tell you—" For Walter's tall, graceful figure stood at the door; his face was calm and undisturbed.

"This is our waltz, Miss Chichester," and he walked up slowly and offered her his arm, she rose and took it. Arthur got up at the same moment, he looked as angry as she did. But her anger had suddenly gone, as if Walter's mere look had been sufficient to chill every drop of her blood that had been almost like fire in her veins. But it was not his presence that had occasioned this, it was fear, fear of the most torturing description, the fear that she was a deceitful, vain, heartless girl in the eyes of the only man she cared should think her pure, upright, and truthful—the man she loved so deeply, that she knew not herself the depth of her love. She was afraid, afraid he had heard her brother say that she had

promised to marry David Graham, and the thought was agony to her. She trembled so, she could scarcely walk—he felt it.

"Come and sit down for a minute."

"No, no, dance, let us dance directly," she answered.

He put his arm round her, and for a moment pressed her to him. "Dear Hilda," he said it almost as if to himself and not to her.

"Oh, I cannot dance, take me to the window."

They were fortunately not very far from it, she stepped out on to the large balcony that was covered over, and leaning against the side, burst into tears. He left her for a moment till the paroxism was over, and then came, and leaning over her took one of her hands, and said in such a gentle voice,

"You are unhappy, tell me what it is, I fear I may have been in some way the

cause of your annoyance. God knows I would rather suffer torture of any kind than see you so."

He spoke sincerely, at that moment he loved Hilda; he had never seen her but joyous and happy, and now he saw her in such bitter grief that all the best feelings in his nature were roused, her hand remained passively in his, the other was covering her face, her sobs still continued, but he thought her tears had ceased.

"Look up, darling, let me see your sweet face, I cannot bear this," and his voice slightly trembled.

She did look up, and such a look of intense deep happiness he had never beheld, the tears were still in her eyes and on her cheeks; but his fond, gentle words had made her forget all, everything else, but that he loved her, that he was unhappy at seeing her so, and she resolved he should never suffer on her account again. She

thought, she hoped, she prayed he had not heard Arthur's words. She was looking up with her loving sincere eyes in his face, he could read her whole soul in those eyes, and she let him; she thought she had never seen him so handsome as at that moment, there was a soft, tender, sad look, which she had never seen before.

"Do you really love me, Hilda?" he asked, as if he were incredulous, but he asked only to hear how she would word her answer. It is decidedly pleasant to be told one is loved, especially when by a young and beautiful girl. Hilda had no idea of denying, but she did not know how to answer. Her head was bent down, he gently raised it, "Look at me, and tell me with your own dear lips that it is so."

She coloured, but answered without further hesitation: "More than I thought it was possible to love aught human."

He put his arm round her, he pressed

her to his breast, she felt his heart beat, and for a moment it beat truly for her, with a honest true love; he felt it and basked in its sunshine for a second, he stooped and kissed her lips, and whispered,

"Will you love me always?"

"Always!" she replied, and then she darted out of his arms, and passing into the boudoir, which was close to the window, went out by a door in the wall, which was hidden by the drapery, up to her room. She did not go down any more.

CHAPTER IX.

THE morning after Lady Fordyce's ball, Walter Wentworth was sitting in his room. A very cheery, comfortable room, and his breakfast untouched on the table. He did not look in keeping with his den as he had chosen to term it, for he was looking pale and haggard, as if he had passed a sleepless night—and he had.

When Hilda left him in the balcony, he sat down for a few minutes, and thought of what had passed, but, with herself, all his good and honest feelings went. It seemed as if he had awoke from a dream; he could scarcely feel certain that it was

not; he could not understand himself, he was such a stranger to any natural strong impulse, that he marvelled how, even for a few minutes, he had felt anything so true and genuine as the momentary love for Hilda had been. It was a pity she had not remained, for she might have kept it there, in his heart a little longer, and there is no knowing what revolution it might not have created within him by a longer duration. He roused himself up, for fear he should be missed, and as he thought she might not return, it was doubly necessary he should be forthcoming. So the same cold, hard Walter Wentworth that walked into the balcony walked out again, it seemed as if the man who had been within must have been another.

The rooms were nearly empty, he went slowly through the dancing-room and came to the front drawing-room. Arthur was talking to Mrs. Phillips, Walter had to pass

between them to go in; he thought it would be better to go on than turn back, so he apologized, and was passing on, when Mrs. Phillips, in her ungenial voice, said,

"What have you done with my cousin, Mr. Wentworth?" He turned round, and said, calmly and sternly,

"Did you speak to me, Mrs. Phillips?"

Matilda did not like his look, but Arthur gave her no time to substitute a mild answer.

"Mrs. Phillips asked where you left my sister, as I saw her go with you to dance."

"Your sister, Mr. Chichester, left me, and she declined dancing with me. I have not seen her since."

A pleased look passed over Arthur's face, but Wentworth heeded it not; he knew quite well that the game was in his own hands, he was indifferent, therefore, whether Arthur was pleased for a moment, seemingly, at his expense or not. Wentworth was looking for

William Munro, he was the only intimate friend he had, and he was almost like his second self. They were very much of the same cold, hard character, though so different in appearance, for William Munro was not above the middle height; he was fair, and had a young-looking face, though he was Wentworth's senior by some ten years, but this was occasioned from having no beard, and that to a fair man, always gives youth.

Wentworth was quite certain William would not go without him, or telling him he was going; for when they met out, which was not very often—as William Munro, owing to his deafness, rarely went into much society, always, as a matter of course, walked home with Wentworth, and smoked their cigars together. However, he found that the drawing-rooms did not hold his friend, so he went down stairs, and there he found him, half-awake, half-asleep, hunting for his hat in the cloak-room.

"What a fellow you are, Wentworth! I can't wait any longer. I'm off."

"Well, let me just find my hat, and I'll be with you in a minute."

And so they went out together, only waiting till John, the respectable white-headed butler, lighted a piece of paper for their cigars. They walked down Park Lane into Piccadilly, and up Piccadilly till they came to St. James's Street.

"Oh, there's no use in your thinking of the club," said Munro, "it's closed by this, or ought to be."

"I was not thinking of it," said Wentworth, quietly; "but come home with me and finish your cigar there."

So they walked on till they came to Wentworth's lodgings; he opened his door with his latch-key, and they walked up to his sitting-room. Wentworth did things generally differently to what any one else did; it was, perhaps, for that reason that his bed-

room was on the ground-floor, and his sitting-room above. Though it was very nearly daylight he struck a light, and lighted the candles that were on the mantle-piece.

"There is no use in lighting the lamp, I suppose," he said.

"No, nor the candles either, that I can see. What a jolly chair this is; worth all those sofas and chairs and other things we had to-night," said Mr. Munro.

"I am glad you think so, as you are able to enjoy it," said Wentworth.

They smoked away for some time, and the cigars were nearly at an end. William Munro knew that Wentworth had something to say to him, and was astonished it had not been said from the commencement, for generally Wentworth said what he wished at once and made an end of it. William thought, perhaps, there was something serious; that he might be in some difficulty, and too proud to ask his friend to help him.

"What's wrong with you, Wentworth, you don't seem yourself to-night? out with it at once, and make a clean breast of it. What! can't you? are you in love or in debt?"

Munro began to fear the latter, for he could not for an instant delude himself by thinking the former.

"Neither," replied Wentworth, slowly; "at least, I am certainly not in debt, and I don't think I'm in love."

"But of the latter you are apparently not quite so satisfied," said Munro, smiling.

"What do you think of Miss Chichester?" asked Wentworth.

"Don't tell me you are in love with that pale-faced, big-eyed girl, I don't believe it!" and Munro seemed indignant.

"No!" slowly replied Wentworth, "I'm not in love with Miss Chichester, but suppose she is in love with me, and add to that, suppose she is bound to marry another man."

William Munro looked up; Wentworth's face was grave and unreadable.

"If, as you say, Miss Chichester is in love with you, and going to marry some one else, so much the better for you;" and he smiled, as he if thought him a most enviable fellow.

"Yes, but remember, she does not consider herself bound—she has given no promise; but she at the time this marriage was proposed and arranged raised no positive objection, so that her family look on her as virtually engaged."

"So much the better for you."

"But why?" said Wentworth, beginning to get irritated because William Munro's ideas so exactly coincided with his own, and he wanted opposition, and not to read his own feelings over again. "I tell you she loves me; she told me so herself to-night," and he got up, threw his cigar away, and with a hand in each pocket, paced up and down his small

room. "It was her mother told me of her engagement, foolish woman; she seemed to think it her duty to put me on my guard," he said; "but she did not know it was too late—yes, too late," and he seemed for a moment to feel a return of his better nature, for he turned suddenly round. "Munro," he said, "what would you do in my place, would you go away and never see her again, or leave things as they are? I know she considers herself free, for old Lady Willesden also spoke to me about her this evening, and said that Miss Chichester had herself told her she was not engaged, though their marriage was looked on as a matter-of-course; but she is so truthful, that I am certain she feels in no way bound. How people must watch, for every one but that confounded clumsy fool, Graham, seems to have noticed what they please to term a preference on her part for me; but, Munro, you don't tell me what I should do. Come, make haste and say something."

"I don't think there is the least use in my advising you, you probably have already decided how you mean to act; and, of course, you would not follow my advice even if you had not, and what I might say—"

"It's very probable I might not do what you advised, but you can't tell till you try."

Munro puffed away at his cigar, with his elbows leaning on the table. Wentworth came and stood on the other side of it, exactly facing him; he waited quietly for some minutes, and then said an impatient, "Well!"

Munro took his cigar out of his mouth, knocked off the ashes, and then looking him full in the face said—

"Do you like the girl?"

"What's the use of asking me that? I didn't tell you I wanted to be questioned. Like her? why I like her, she is young, beautiful, and loves me. How in the wide world can I help liking her?"

"Do you love her?"

"No!" and Wentworth paced up and down the room again.

"You would not then openly propose for her to her brother or mother, or uncle or aunt, or whoever her proper guardian may be, and run the chance of being accepted, and their giving her a fortune in consideration of your poverty?"

"Be kept by my wife? No, if I loved her as dearly as I believe she loves me, I would not do that. I would say, 'Be my wife, and I will work for you if you can put up with the home I can offer;' but, Munro, it's not in my nature to love any woman in that way."

"You don't know, Wentworth; you are young; you don't know what your heart is capable of yet; wait till you are my age, and you will tell me a different tale; but that has nothing to do with this," and a shade passed over Munro's face that told he knew what

the human heart could be made to suffer. "Well, then," continued Munro, "it won't do for you to propose unless you think you won't be refused; they may like a good match, and not listen to a man who has only enough to keep himself and nothing over."

"Of course her family would refuse; but if I wished to marry her, I should not care for that. I could make her marry me without their consent; but as I don't, why there is no use in talking about it."

"Well, then, Wentworth, for God's sake go, and don't see her again, what will be the end if you don't? Either she will marry this clumsy cousin of her's, as you call him, hating him and loving you; and then what a prospect she will have, poor girl! or they will make you marry her, if it should ever come to such a point that she, on your account, refuses to fulfil her promise."

"But she made no promise."

"Well, she didn't refuse, did she? and then what is your position?"

Wentworth threw himself on to the sofa, he was thoroughly perplexed, he did not know what to do. Right whispered, "Follow your friend's advice and go;" but Wrong said, "stay and be happy both of you, at all events, for a few weeks longer."

"Well, Wentworth, what do your meditations bring you to?"

"I don't know; I must think a little longer, and see what I had best decide on, I am sadly perplexed."

"Well, promise me not to go to the Opera to-morrow to meet her, for you know she is going, and she knows that you do know it."

"Yes, if it will relieve your mind at all, I don't care; and were I to go it would be late."

"Well, then, you won't much care. I must be off now, for I have to go into the City early in the morning. A dreadful nuisance! I never feel clean for two whole days after."

When his friend was gone, Wentworth got up and began pacing the room again. His thoughts were more like two people arguing, than one man's sober meditation on a matter endangering his happiness, and probably his honour. They ran very much in this way.

"After all, why should I trouble myself about the matter? why should I excite myself because a girl, without a penny, has chosen to fall in love with me. I gave her no reason to think I preferred her to any one else; or, if I did, she must have been marvellously on the alert to have discovered it. How lovely she looked when she was on the balcony, and when she told me she loved me more than she thought it was possible. I almost thought I loved her, too; what beautiful eyes she has! I don't think I ever saw such eyes! she seemed to drink in with them every word and look of mine; but it is very pleasant to be loved so,

and to feel and know that mine were the first lips that ever pressed her's. Well, I have had the first kiss, at all events. I wonder what she thought about it? I think she was happy—she looked so. By Jove! if I were rich, I really think I could marry that girl.

"But she is strangely different to most of them. Why, she has not only told me how she loves me, but has let me kiss her, and promised to love me always, and I have never told her I cared two straws about her. It's true, I let her imagine it by my actions, but nothing more. But she is so truthful and genuine. I doubt if it will ever strike her how I have led her on, and said nothing. I wish I had not, it's not a very comforting feeling; there is something in it jars against me.

"I am not sure that it was quite honourable; and yet, if a girl will throw herself at a man, in the way she has at me, what

right has she to expect any particular consideration on my part? I am sure her brother hates me. Well, that does not matter in the least. I heard him last night telling her to remember she was David Graham's promised wife. I dare say he had been speaking about me as he found me there. I am sure though, she meant to have denied being promised to any one, if I had not gone in. What a rage she seemed in! but I soon put her in a good humour again. He shan't bully her in that way. What is it to him what she does? her uncle is there to look after her. Her brother has no right, no possible right, to interfere. If he does, he shall yet be sorry for it!"

It was a great pity Arthur Chichester crossed Wentworth's thoughts as he did, for he felt so angry with him, when he recollected how he had found Hilda with him in the boudoir, that he to revenge himself, felt he could sacrifice Hilda.

Had Wentworth been born a rich man, or had he become so suddenly, when he first became acquainted with Hilda Chichester, he probably would have been a good man, there were one or two redeeming qualities in his character; but the bad ones so predominated, it required the fond indulgent eye of love to make them appear at all.

His handsome face and his beautiful voice had been his ruin—if, in the term ruin, is understood the deadening of all honest, upright feeling, and the creating and increasing selfish, hard, proud ones in their place. He could hate, but he could not love. There was a sternness in his character that diffused a coldness over his whole being. He liked William Munro, perhaps, better than any one else; and he liked wealth and his own comforts better than anything else. But his pride would never have allowed him to be indebted to a woman for either; he would

not sell himself; he would remain rather as he was, than be raised to the highest point his ambition could dream of, through marrying a woman he did not love.

And yet many men, far better men, too, than Walter Wentworth, had done so, and would do so again. He knew Tom Phillips had only married his wife for what he could get; and that, moreover, he had been much disgusted at not having the amount of her fortune in thousands, as he had been led to expect, instead of the hundreds he really did get. And, then, what a woman he had into the bargain; enough to drive a man wild to go home and find such a face to greet him. Wentworth thought he should certainly blow his brains out, were he in Captain Phillips' position.

He had now been some hours trying to decide something, but he left off just where he began; he consoled himself, however, by thinking he had the remainder of the night,

and the whole of the next day, to come to some decision. He was not sorry he had promised William Munro he would not go to the Opera. He had to go to chambers some time during the day, in case, by accident, any one should have left a brief for him, and there might be one; which would enable him to have a good excuse for remaining at home to read it, should Hilda, when they met, ask the cause of his not going.

CHAPTER X.

When Hilda disengaged herself from Wentworth's arms, and went up to her own room, she was some time before she could actually realize what had taken place. She was in the dark, but she went to her window and pulled up her blind.

Day was beginning to break, there was a light streak in the distance that she knew would soon spread.

She threw the window open, and leant out. The carriages were still standing in long lines, though so many had left, and in front of the door, was the one officious linkman, shouting out names that were never heard

before, with other carriages trying to push and squeeze in, that they might be the first to drive up; probably, not to accommodate their mistresses—who were standing with paper shoes on the cold stone steps, or shivering with the fresh morning air, after the hot rooms, in the hall—but that they might get to their own beds as quickly as possible, and if the horses could speak, they would have echoed their drivers' sentiments.

But Hilda was regardless and heedless of all that was going on beneath her. There she stood, with her bare arms resting on the stone outside her window, and her face peering up in the sky, as if Walter was to be seen there.

But whatever her arms and face were doing, she, at that moment, was standing in the balcony with Walter, with his lips pressed to hers. She seemed to remember nothing else; she could not move, she could in no way change her position, however

much she tried. There she was, in his arms against his heart.

Then he did love her—he must love her; love her, as she knew she loved him. The words of her catechism came before her—with all her heart, with all her soul, with all her mind, and with all her strength—*so* she loved him.

Why was it she so constantly said to herself "So he does love me." She did not know, she supposed she must have doubted it, and yet how *could* she doubt him? Had he not asked her, within a very few minutes, if she would always love him? If he had not wished it, he would not have asked her, if he had not loved her, he would not have wished it.

Her argument seemed reasonable; we much doubt if we ourselves had been in her position, whether we should not have felt as secure as she did. She knew nothing at all of Walter's circumstances, and she never

once gave them a thought, it was sufficient for her that he loved her. Had he turned out an impostor, or a prince, it would have made no change in her. It was not who he might prove to be, or what he may have been, it was himself she loved. No disgrace or distinction would have changed the current of her all-absorbing devotion.

"Mrs. Graham's carriage stops the way."

Hilda had been standing more than half-an-hour at her window, and every one's carriage in turn seemed to have been called out, but yet this was the first that she heard. She wondered whether they thought it odd she should have left the room, or whether they had missed her at all.

She had scarcely spoken to old Mr. and Mrs. Graham all the evening; she liked them, and she was sorry that, for their sakes, she could not like their son. She sometimes was astonished at his being so disagreeable,

as she thought him, with such a charming old father and mother.

She put her head as far out of the window as she could to watch them get in, but she was too high up to perceive who the people were, with only lamps to light the night with.

But she lingered on watching, she thought she might catch another glimpse of Walter. She did not dare go down again, she could not possibly meet him after what had passed, with so many eyes looking on. She thought every one must know all, as she did.

So there she remained, her burning cheeks resting against the cold stone outside her window. She had neither gloves, handkerchief, fan, or bouquet, she thought all must have been left in the balcony; not her bouquet, for that she knew she left in the boudoir, Walter had asked her to do so; and her heart beat with joy, to think he loved her so much as even to feel jealous, for if he had not been jealous, he never would have dis-

liked her carrying that stupid, good-natured Lord Borton's flowers.

It is strange the effect that love has on human beings. It produces selfishness in them, whereas, in animals, it creates generosity; a dog or a horse are inclined to be docile to their greatest enemies, if their master, whom they love, tells them to be still, and yet a man will hate the man the woman he loves will tell him to like; and what woman could love, or have the most distant regard for the woman she thought was liked by the man she loved. On the contrary, it would breed distrust and misery, for we are selfish, innately selfish. We seem born so.

It was pure selfishness made Wentworth not like Hilda letting Lord Borton see she wore his flowers after she knew they were his gift. It was selfishness made Arthur wish Hilda not to dance with Wentworth, or encourage him in any way; for his sister as the wife of a real Scotch laird, and his sister the

wife of a poor, briefless barrister, were very different people in Arthur's eyes.

It was selfishness, and most natural, pardonable selfishness, that made Hilda wish to become Walter's wife instead of David's, because, by the former, she gratified herself—by the latter, she would gratify every one but herself. But she was hardly to be expected, however perfect her character, to entirely sacrifice herself for others, but as she was far from perfect, it was even less to be wondered at.

As she stood there, with the cool night breeze fanning her hot brow, she thought to become Walter's wife must be the most perfect happiness it was possible for a created being to dream of. She began to think what love was; but that was a problem she could not solve. She knew what it was, but could not express it even in thought. She felt what it was, but could not define it. But she did not much care, she felt it was

there, in her heart, deep-rooted; and all she did, was to water it plentifully, to let it grow strongly.

She was indeed building castles in the air, so airy, that the slight vibration from a knock at her door, to which she had not time to answer before it opened, blew them all away, and Strange stalked in.

She was a cold, stiff creature, this Strange, and though she had been Hilda's maid so many years, she did not like her; she always was sorry to see her come in the room, always so glad to see her go out.

"Dear me, Miss, every one has been looking for you everywhere, and my Lady is quite out about it!"

"You can light the candles, and undress me, Strange," said Hilda, paying no attention to her remarks.

"Why, Miss, you are surely not going to bed! There's still lots of people; and, really, Miss, it seems so very odd, your

going to bed when the company's not gone !"

Hilda did not hear a word Strange was saying to her; as she was lighting the candles, Hilda began unclasping her bracelets, and putting them herself in their cases.

"Come, Strange, undo my dress, if you please."

"Do you really mean, Miss, you don't intend going down again ?"

Hilda looked round at her maid as if she were going to ask her some question, but she seemed to change her mind; for, simply saying "No," but in a tone that was most decisive, she waited for the aid she had been in vain asking for.

"Well, of course, Miss, I must undress you if you desire it," and she at length set to work.

Hilda was thankful when she was gone. She bolted her door, and having her dressing-gown wrapped round her, she blew

out the candles, and went back to the window.

It was nearly daylight, and she watched the still few remaining carriages drive off one by one, with their wearied-looking occupants.

She had sat some time, the last was now gone, and she thought she would go to bed, and try to sleep a little, for she was quite worn out with excitement. The air was chilly, and she was going to close the window, when there was a knock at the door.

She was vexed at being disturbed, she wondered what could have brought that tiresome Strange back. She said, "Come in," rather impatiently; but though the handle turned, the door did not open. Hilda remembered bolting it. She went, though by no means hurriedly, and undid it.

"What do you want?—oh, it's you, auntie! I beg your pardon, I thought it was Strange come back for something."

"What did you lock your door for, my

dear? It is not safe, Hilda; if there was a fire, you might be burnt to death."

Her aunt came in and shut the door, she was in her dressing-gown.

"Are you not well, my child? You look so pale, and so dark under the eyes. I came to see what was the matter with you, that you came to bed—or not to bed, but away from down stairs."

"I don't know, auntie, dear," and she sat down on the sofa by her aunt, and laid her head on her shoulder, and burst into tears.

It was something so new to Lady Fordyce to see her niece in this state, that she could not say anything, but put her arms round her and kissed her.

"What is it, my darling?" she said, at length, "what are you unhappy about?"

"Oh, I am not unhappy; I am so, so happy!" and she looked up with a bright smile, though the tears were yet running fast down her cheeks.

"You have over-exerted yourself, my child; you must go to bed and sleep, and tell me all about it to-morrow."

The words recalled Hilda to herself. "Tell her all about it to-morrow," why what could she tell? she could not, dare not tell her aunt what had passed this evening.

"I have nothing to tell you, my own dear auntie, but that I am a sillly girl, and, as you say, I have been rather worn out with the pleasure to-night. You know I danced so much, and I thought if I stayed down stairs I should be obliged to dance on, and so the only way of escaping was to come to bed."

"But, my dear, why then didn't you go to bed?"

"Because the morning looked so fresh and lovely I could not make up my mind."

"I don't, myself, see anything so fresh and lovely in the morning, it feels damp and chilly, and you ought not to have your

window open," and Lady Fordyce got up and shut it. "Now go to bed at once, dear child, and sleep as long as you can," and she kissed her again and left her.

Hilda went to bed, but could not sleep. She could do nothing but think. All Arthur said to her crossed her mind again, and for the first time an undefined, vague fear crossed her, as to whether others might not think as well as he did that she was engaged to David. Perhaps David himself might think so—and he certainly did think he was to marry her; and supposing her mother, and her uncle, and aunt all still thought she meant to marry him, what should she do? She determined that as soon after breakfast as she could, she would speak to her aunt, and tell her it was quite impossible for her to become David's wife, she would give no reason, excepting that she did not like him sufficiently, and then it would, of course, be all right. And, by way of putting Arthur

in a good humour, she would ask her aunt to let her write and invite Lucy Fenton to stay a fortnight with them. She had forgotten Arthur had asked her to do so, and it struck her it might be her forgetfulness of his wishes had made him so harsh and unkind to her—for so she thought his conduct to her.

Nothing but affection prompted Arthur to talk to and of his sister as he had done; but he had chosen an unwise method with her, she wanted gentle handling, and he was too rough; she had been such a petted, spoilt child, she had never heard a reproof, but in a loving, tender tone, and she became restive, and fretted under Arthur's light curb. But she was too forgiving to bear resentment, and thought probably her own neglect caused him to be unhappy, for, now she herself knew what love was, her eyes were more open, and she thought she remembered trifling circumstances that made her

think her brother might really be attached to that silly, meek, but affectionate girl; and when once she was in London, Arthur would have something else to think about, and no longer worry himself about her.

So there were double reasons, and seemingly to Hilda very good ones, why Lucy Fenton should be invited, and on this consoling thought she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

"AUNT, I want very much to speak to you if you can spare the time," said Hilda to Lady Fordyce the morning after the ball, when she thought her aunt had done giving all her daily household orders.

"Certainly, dear, what do you want? you won't be long, I suppose, because Dutton has not had her orders yet."

Lady Fordyce was standing, which gave her the appearance of wishing to go directly. There is nothing so annoying as when you are anxious to have a serious half-hour's talk, to be told not to be long, because the person you are desirous of speaking to

is in a hurry. Hilda thought she could not tell her aunt she would not marry David, whilst she was standing there anxious to get away to give her housekeeper the necessary orders for dinner. It would be better to wait till she was free; she could tell her so much more comfortably if she were not hurried.

"I will wait till by and bye, aunt, I did not know you were busy."

"Very well, dear."

But all that day the by and bye did not come that Hilda waited for. They were so late this morning, that before Lady Fordyce had done it was luncheon time, and as they dined early to go to the opera, the carriage was ordered round immediately luncheon was over.

Hilda was nervous and restless all day. A cloud seemed suddenly to come between her and the sunshine of her existence, there was no reason for it, except that she longed

to throw off the weight that she felt this unacknowledged tie between her and her cousin was to her.

She went to the Opera; it was the opera she was so anxious to hear, 'Les Huguenots,' and yet she was indifferent to what, on any other night, would have stirred the enthusiasm in her nature. Mr. Munro was in his stall, so she knew Walter would not be there, unless he came very late. She was glad when her aunt proposed going, and yet she went to bed that night more weary and tired than the night before.

After church on Sunday, the next day, Hilda made another attempt to speak to her aunt, and this time more successfuly. Hilda proposed their going into the boudoir, no one ever went in there, they would be sure to be still and undisturbed.

"Why, my dear Hilda, you must have something very important to tell me, surely, that you are so afraid of being interrupted."

"Well, aunt, it is important, but as I have something to ask you that is not so very particular, I will ask it first, or the great matter may drive the smaller one out of my mind. Will you let me write and ask Lucy Fenton to come and stay a week or ten days with me?"

"Yes, dear, if you like; but I did not know you and Lucy were such friends. She always seemed to me, though older than you, so childish and uncompanionable."

"Well, you see, aunt, it is not quite for myself, but I think—you know this is a little secret between us, so you must not even tell my uncle—that Arthur rather likes Lucy, and I am certain Lucy likes him, and don't you think it would do very well for them to marry?"

Lady Fordyce smiled. "Why, my darling, since when have you turned match-maker?"

"Only since this moment, auntie, but tell me what you think?"

"I don't see any objection if they like it. Arthur has a good appointment, and the longer he holds it the better it will become. I believe Lucy will have something of her own, or has it, I suppose, as she is of age, and so, if they like to live on love, they are old enough to know it's not very nourishing."

"But, aunt, Arthur has now three hundred pounds a-year, and what do you think Lucy has?"

"Perhaps two."

"Surely they can live on five hundred. Cannot people live on five hundred a-year, aunt?" and she looked at her aunt's face rather anxiously.

"I dare say they could, for I believe Lucy has been brought up on very economical principles, and Arthur is not extravagant, and there is no knowing whether Lucy may not have more."

"They could live together couldn't they?" said Hilda.

"I should think they would, if they married," replied Lady Fordyce.

"Oh, you know what I mean, auntie; I mean mamma could live with them, and that would help them."

"You seem very anxious about getting them married, Hilda, what is the reason?"

"Nothing more than that I think Arthur will be happier married."

"And have something else to think of than troubling himself about you," added Lady Fordyce; "is there not something in that?"

"No, indeed, there is not, it never crossed my mind; but why do you say so? Has Arthur been talking to you about me?"

"No; but he is going to do so, or rather your mother. I don't know what it is, but I am to go to-morrow afternoon to Kensington Square, unless your mother feels well enough

to come here, and then she will be in time for luncheon. But, now, if you have got over your unimportant request, what is the important one? for the afternoon is passing, and we are sure to be interrupted by visitors if you don't make haste."

There was a pause of a few moments, Hilda felt her heart beat, and she could not think of any words to begin what she had to say. Was she not, perhaps, foolish after all, in stirring the matter up, for neither her uncle or aunt, or the Grahams, ever alluded to it. But then Arthur had, and her mamma was going to speak to Lady Fordyce to-morrow, and about her; of course, Arthur had told his mother to do so. Oh, yes, she would speak at once, and then have done with the subject for ever.

"Aunt, do you think it wrong to break a promise if you never made it?" She spoke slowly and thoughtfully.

"How can you be so foolish, Hilda? If

you never made a promise, how can you possibly break it?"

"No; but, though you don't make a promise, if you make people think, or let them believe you have, though of course you have not really, and you let them go on thinking for a long time—do you think it would be wrong in the end to say, it was a mistake or misunderstanding."

"It would not be wrong to say it was a mistake, dear Hilda, but the wrong would be ever having allowed the mistake to arise; and, if any one did so knowingly, it would be worse than wrong, it would be a silent lie!" Hilda started up, the colour rushed over her whole face and neck.

"A lie! Aunt, oh don't say that—a lie! Oh, I never, never told or acted a lie in my life!" and she pressed her two hands together.

"Why, dear child, what do you mean? did I ever say you did? God forbid it! No,

Hilda, one of the greatest charms to me in your character is its simple, truthful nature! but don't stand so, child. What is it? Come here, come, and sit by me again, and explain to me what it is causing you to talk and look as you do."

Hilda made no reply, she sat down by her aunt—she had become as pale as she was red before—she rested her head on her hands. Lady Fordyce watched her with a sorrowful countenance, too, for she knew no trifle could work so on Hilda, and she had a dread of hearing some sorrow had befallen her darling. She knew it was a rare thing for Hilda to be excited. She was naturally a placid, calm disposition; but surely, whatever it was, she could comfort her and make it right, if she would only open her heart and tell her.

"My darling child, don't sit so; tell me what is causing you such sorrow, tell me everything; you know I love you dearer

than anything in the world, and you will break my heart, Hilda, if I see you like this, that you won't let me comfort you and help you."

"A lie! oh, how dreadful!" was all she uttered, and a shudder passed through her.

"What do you mean about a lie, Hilda? you cannot have told a lie, unless you know it; and, if it had been told unconsciously, it was not one. Be reasonable, dear! look up, and tell me your troubles; and depend upon it, you will find you have been torturing yourself for nothing." Lady Fordyce took her hands away from her face; they were as cold as marble.

"Do you really think so? Oh, don't say so, if you don't think so!" She grasped at the stream of hope held out to her.

"You forget," said Lady Fordyce, "I don't yet know what it is yet. Come, tell me, for you are only prolonging your own

misery, and causing me to be very unhappy!"

"I never will do that, dearest auntie, if I can; help me—" She paused, but Lady Fordyce thought she had better not speak; she might say the wrong thing, and prevent her telling her.

"I was going to tell you—that is, I thought, I had better speak now about it—" Another pause, she found it so difficult now to tell, after her aunt saying she had permitted a lie to be understood; still her aunt did not speak. If she could only get his name once out, she thought she could go on, but how was she to do so. At length Lady Fordyce said:

"Have you done anything wrong, Hilda, that you feel ashamed to tell me?"

The words had the right effect; the young girl's pride came to her aid; her tongue was loosened, and the words came out fast enough now; the colour, too,

returned to her pale cheeks and lips as she raised her head.

"Ashamed of anything?—done anything wrong? No, aunt; but you might well imagine it by my silence. I have, perhaps, been passive when I ought to have asserted my objections. It is with regard to David Graham I wished to speak; with regard to to my so-called engagement with him."

A shade passed over her aunt's face; but she did not notice it, and continued—

"When it was first arranged at Burwood I did not oppose it, because every one there told me it would make all happy; and it seemed so selfish, if it were in my power to make so many people happy, that I should not do so, and, therefore, it was a sort of understood thing that I was to marry David Graham; but you, dear aunt, kindly suggested there should be no engagement till the end of my first season—that I should be free; and, though I ought, I am sure, to

have spoken sooner, much sooner, for I have felt ever since I came to London that I could not love David, however much I might like him; and so, for fear of doing more wrong by delaying it, I determined to tell you that I cannot marry David—I cannot become his wife!"

Lady Fordyce did not reply, because she did not know what to say. Hilda went on.

"You don't think, aunt, I have permitted a lie?—oh, say you don't, for that would make me very, very unhappy!"

"What is the reason you do not like David—you used to like him? and, if he is changed at all since then, it is certainly for the better."

Lady Fordyce spoke coldly. Hilda was watching her face, but it agreed with the tone of her voice. She had never seen her aunt look so, and it sent a chill to her heart.

"I don't know why I don't like him, I only know I don't."

One cannot make the heart beat for those we wish; if it does love, it does so insensibly, and one don't know it till you find it full, brimming over. It is because there is so much that one first discovers it; it becomes painful, and aches with joy.

"But, Hilda, you must try to like him. Listen to me, dear child," she laid her hand on Hilda's arm, and bent fondly over her, and spoke in her own kind, natural voice again, "you cannot have thought of the pain it would cause me and your uncle—I will not name any others, for I am sure your love for us is sufficient to make you do what is right—were you to persist in what you have now said.

"You are very young, and youth always meets with admiration; I daresay you have received plenty, and you therefore feel vexed with David that he never offers you what

even those who are indifferent to you do. Don't interrupt me, dear, let me tell you all I wish, and then you can speak. But you should remember that he, in regarding you as his future wife, does not think it would be treating you with what is due, were he to flatter you and pay you compliments; he thinks you are above such folly, that the true love of an honest man needs no gilding. It is gold, pure gold, though, perhaps, in a rough state, and all the polishing in the world would not make it one whit more valuable.

"In a worldly point of view, nothing could be more desirable than your marriage with him; and so do not, my dear girl, begin now to stuff your head full of romantic, foolish notions about the amount of love necessary to marry on; rely on what I tell you, respect and esteem the man you are going to marry, and your husband you will soon learn to love."

"But I don't respect and esteem David!" said Hilda, impetuously.

"Not respect and esteem David? Impossible, Hilda! Why, if ever a man was born to be respected and esteemed, it is he. He may not be so handsome or refined as many men you meet, especially in London; but he has intrinsic worth, far above any outward show. He is honest, honourable, and upright."

"And selfish, ill-tempered, and bad-mannered."

"You are talking like a child, Hilda." Lady Fordyce knew it was true, and so she was half angry with Hilda, because she felt, that, with truth, she could not contradict her. "But supposing he were as unamiable as you say, you knew it at Burwood, you did not then complain of all this. No; depend upon it, Hilda, when your mind regains its proper tone, all this will pass by, for something or other has helped to put these fool-

ish ideas in your head. It is not natural, were it not so, that you should speak as you do."

"But I assure you, aunt, nothing has happened to cause me to feel so, for I have felt it ever since I came to town; and didn't you say it was not fair to shackle me by an engagement during my first season? You see, even you yourself thought I should not like him after seeing others, and comparing him with them."

"You quite mistook my motive, Hilda, in proposing that you should not be bound by any openly acknowledged tie; it was simply that knowing so well how society is constituted, I was sure, were you introduced as a *fiancée*, your season would have been anything but a joyous one, you would have been left out in many a party where now you are sought for. The world is a monster with many mouths, and all would have been ready to have made ill-natured remarks on every

act, however innocent it might have been. It would, by many, have been thought wrong in you to dance. It must have entailed many disagreeables on David that I don't think he would quite have liked. It would but have been proper, had you been openly engaged, that he should have been with you as much as possible, that the attentions you now receive from all, should have been but received from him. That was my reason that there should be no engagement admitted; but you know quite well, Hilda, that as matters stand, you are to be married in July, and if that was the understood arrangement, surely it is folly to talk of being under no promise. But we won't talk about it any more; it is nearly six o'clock, go and take a turn in the garden before you dress for dinner."

"I should like to know what my uncle thinks—do you mind speaking to him about it?" asked Hilda, in a desponding tone.

"I will, if you desire it, but I know so well what he will say. Men, like him, have very little consideration, at any time, for a woman who argues for or against a marriage, on the principle that love is necessary. He would tell you, obedience and submission on your part is what is required, and nothing more."

"Submit and be obedient to David! No, never! If I marry him, I shall hate him, and I shall tell him so."

The idea of obeying him roused her, and she felt then nothing should induce her to give way; she would refuse to marry him, they could not make her.

"Hilda, you are laying up sad and bitter hours for the future, if you give way to your temper in this manner." Lady Fordyce spoke slowly and affectionately; Hilda was going to speak, but she went on, "Believe me, a woman never gains anything by violence or opposition; it has pleased God

that we should submit, and therefore, it must be good for us. Do not try to fly in the face of God's laws, it can but end in sorrow and misery. I fear I have not been judicious with you; I fear I have loved you too dearly, made you too much my idol; and now, as a punishment, I shall have to suffer through you, for if you persist, what can I do, but suffer, and alone, for no one will feel for me, all will say it is my own doing for my blind indulgence." Her voice faltered, and the quivering lip told Hilda of the pain her aunt was then enduring.

She would rather suffer herself than see that. She forgot for the moment the great sacrifice required of her, she only saw her fond, kind aunt, who had been more than a mother to her, suffering, and that it was in her power to soothe her. She threw her arms round her neck, and said,

"Don't speak so, dear aunt, I will do

what you wish, and what will make you happy."

"And God will bless and reward you for it, Hilda," and she kissed her forehead and left the room.

She was thankful she had gained her point so far, she feared all her hopes were dashed to the ground, for she had grown to consider Hilda's marriage with David the only one that could be fit for her, it was advisable in every way. She had forgotten her own objections when it was first mooted, for she then thought him what Hilda thought him now; but she had nursed the idea, unconsciously, till she had not only grown accustomed to it, but pleased with it, and proud of it. It never once crossed her mind that Hilda's objections arose from her preferring some one else. In her young days, girls never were guilty of such improprieties, or if they were, no one ever heard of it.

The reason Walter Wentworth had not

occurred to her was simply because he was poor, had he been rich, it probably would have struck her that he admired Hilda, but being a briefless, penniless—or almost so—barrister, that was impossible, and as to her thinking of him, that was still further out of the pale of possibilities. The only cause she did attribute Hilda's change to was to the great admiration she received, and so she began considering who seemed to admire her most. Lord Borton flashed across her mind. Yes! now she could solve the mystery. It was his attentions, for he had sent her a bouquet, together with their romantic way of making acquaintance, and his coronet had added to his attractions. She actually began to think whether Lord Borton would not be quite as desirable a match as David Graham's. However, she would consider the matter, there was no time now, for she had but a very short half hour to dress for dinner, and so she rang for her maid, and

for the moment forgot the subject altogether.

And Hilda, what was she doing all this time, this long half hour? Why, the clock as it struck seven and the dinner bell as it rang, found her where her aunt had left her, sitting in the boudoir, on the same sofa where she had sat with Walter, and in the same spot; and she was thinking of nothing, and no one else but Walter, she had forgotten her conversation with Lady Fordyce altogether. She was thinking over and over again what Walter had said, what Walter had done—and she was happy. She gave way to her own dreaming propensities, and as she was dreaming with her eyes open, she could make her dream end so happily. She knew Walter was poor, but she thought she could make a very good poor man's wife, provided the poor man was Walter, and then her uncle would be sure to do as much for her as the Fentons would do for Lucy,

for she was quite sure Lucy had not half the love lavished on her she had; and so, when the bell rang and found her in her morning dress, there was no remedy, and she went down with a bright face—for her dream, though dispelled, had still left its halo round her countenance, and said she had mistaken the hour, might she be excused for dining as she was.

Lady Fordyce still retained the satisfied feeling that it was Lord Borton had caused the revolution in Hilda's mind, and the contentment consequent on the discovery was spread over her kind, amiable-looking face. Sir William always was pleased when the dinner was good, and in order that the three should look as if some peculiar piece of good fortune had just fallen upon them, the dinner was perfection. They had rarely had so pleasant an evening.

"How nice it is to be alone," said Hilda to her uncle, as she threw herself into the

most comfortable arm-chair in the drawing-room, when they went up from dinner, for when they were quite alone, Sir William never remained down stairs after his wife and Hilda, he always went with them.

"That is not polite, Hilda, considering we are three," he answered, smilingly.

"Well, of course, that is the alone I mean," she said, "don't you like it, uncle? It is like dear old Burwood. I almost wish the time were come for us to be going home, every creature will have forgotten me I'm sure."

"Who's the creature? you don't think Sailor will, I know the brute makes as great a fool of you as you do of him," said Sir William.

"Dear old Sailor! how nice it will be to see his dear old tail wag, and hear his joyous but muffled bark when we go back."

"How can you be so foolish, Hilda," said Lady Fordyce. She did not quite like

those talks of going home, for it had been her intention that Hilda should be married in London, without returning to Burwood, and this sounded so like the reverse. "One would think, if one did not know to the contrary, that that great, big, shaggy, black brute was all you cared for in the world."

"Well, I don't know, Mary, but what she might do worse than bestow her affections on Sailor," said Sir William, laughing.

But Lady Fordyce looked grave, and the turn in the conversation did not seem to add to Hilda's previously contented happy look. They talked of Burwood and Sailor no more, and the excuse was made by Lady Fordyce of going to bed very early, because they had been up so late during the whole week. And so they went.

END OF VOL. II.

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